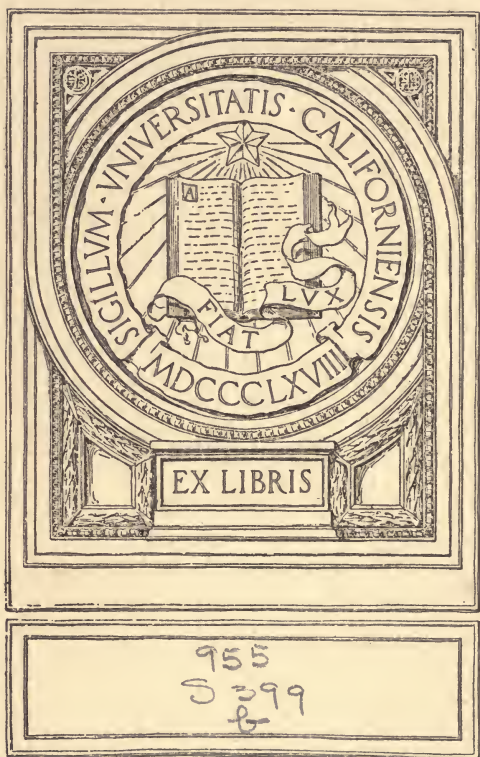


BROTHERS ALL



MAARTEN MAARTENS



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MORE STORIES OF DUTCH
PEASANT LIFE

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS *transl.*

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHEA," ETC.

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ISRAELS!

A BIT OF BIOGRAPHY

"**I** F I were rich—a thing I never shall be—I should chuck up the whole thing to-morrow." The speaker was a man in middle life—Dante's five-and-thirty—pale-faced and nervous, the sort of man who lives by ploughing and harrowing his own brains. He was a fairly successful journalist and writer. At this moment he lay back, tired, in an easy-chair at his club.

The other man, also in an easy-chair, also tired, also a journalist, looked up lazily, watching the blue smoke of his cigar.

"Have you ever reflected," he asked, "what you would do instead?"

"A score of times."

"Do you know, I never have. It has never occurred to me that I could, by any possibility, become rich. In fact, I know I can't."

"Nor can I. It is quite as impossible for me. That constitutes the chief charm of thinking it out."

"I don't quite understand, but I suppose you have more imagination than I have."

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"I have plenty of imagination of a kind. But I have to be the hero of my own imaginings. I don't run to a novel or a play."

"You could live a drama, but you couldn't get one acted by other people." The voice indicated banter. "In other words, you are a strictly subjective genius."

The middle-aged man—he was a good deal the younger of the two—didn't like banter. "I am not a genius at all," he answered shortly. "Would you pass me a light?"

"H'm; I'm not so sure," said the elder man, complying. "Well, tell me, Kortum, if you came into a fortune to-morrow, what would you do? Chuck up all the writing. Get away from the treadmill. Naturally—and then?"

"I should live absolutely and entirely for myself henceforth."

"In these altruistic days that sounds frankly refreshing. You mean you would spend all your money in having an unmitigated good time?"

"Yes."

"Like the once famous Jubilee Plunger?"

"No, not a bit like that. My enjoyments, as you can realize, Hackner, if you choose, would be largely intellectual. Not only so. They would also be sensuous."

"Invite me, please."

"You wilfully misunderstand. My chief delight would be to escape at once, and for ever, from this grey town, from this chill country,

from the whole bleak, ugly North. I should never again, during this brief life, leave sunshine and orange-groves, blue seas and Oriental colour. That, I admit, is merely sensuous—up to a point. For there is more artistic enjoyment in a month of Spain or Italy than in a cycle of—Cathay.”

“You know the South?”

“Know it? No. I have glimpsed at it—twice, in a tourist’s trip—seen its possibilities, like a hungry boy at a pastry-cook’s window. Seen just enough to keep a craving at my heart for ever. Oh, what’s the use of talking? I say, isn’t this a beastly glum hole, this murky, native city of ours? Wouldn’t you be precious glad to escape from it?”

“Well, I don’t know,” replied the elder man, musingly watching his rings of smoke. “It is a beastly place, but I suppose I’ve got past wanting to leave it.”

“Not I. Every year makes it worse—and the horrible grind. However, this sort of talk isn’t much good. I’m out of sorts to-night. Something’s happened to upset me. A fellow had much better simply play the game.”

The grey-haired man looked kindly at the black-haired one. “At your age,” he said, “there’s always a chance of something turning up.”

“Oh, no. And it’s a poor sort of chap who hopes for that! Besides, I once had an only chance—a sort of a chance—and lost it. That’s as much as would fall to the lot of any man.” He

shook himself together. "Please don't think, Hackner, that I'm the sort of fool who goes through life grumbling, and playing in a lottery, or helping old bodies over crossings in hopes of a legacy. You know me better than that."

"I know you better than that, dear boy. It was I that set you building your castles in the air. I assure you I built plenty in my day, if not on the impossible chance of a fortune; but my castles, like many an older one, are—ruins. I am sorry something has occurred to put you out."

"Oh, it's nothing; only I suppose it was that set me talking about money. You know the rich paper-manufacturer, Ostlar?"

"By sight. I hear he is very ill."

"He is dying. I met his doctor this morning. He can't live through the night, the doctor said."

"Well, I suppose he is one of the richest men in the City. His mills and his money will go to some distant relatives, Heaven knows where."

"Or perhaps to a charity?" said Kortum.

"Possibly. One never heard of his having any relations. And it is quite in accordance with the present craze for vast philanthropic bequests."

"I hate," said Kortum, "this parade of charity nowadays. What a sickening thing is all our philanthropic notoriety, in the papers after death, and on the platforms before! I am burning to write a series of articles on it, showing the

people up. Any villain nowadays can earn universal respect by large public donations ; any fool can make himself interesting by talking about the poor. And the meanest of all are those that wait to disgorge some of their ill-gotten gains till they're dead."

" 'Tis easiest for those that have nothing to disgorge, or to leave behind them, to any one."

Kortum remembered that his companion was a married man with a family. He edged away from what might become delicate ground.

"The public like articles abusing the rich," he said. "That's the strangest thing about our time ; they like them, because they think they're deserved. Never, I suppose, not even in Juvenal's day, has money been so entirely the one thing desired and desirable. In the Rome of the Decline, in the Byzantine corruption, there were always a great many superstitions, and a good many class distinctions, left ; we have absolutely nothing but the greed, and the recognition, of gold. Yet, at the same time, even in my day, since I was a boy, there has come up an uncomfortable feeling that the new religion is a base religion, that great wealth is a thing to be ashamed of—the very wealthy themselves are ashamed of it, and try to apologise, as it were, by making some sort of philanthropic stir. I mean the intellects among them ; of course, there are plenty of hereditary fools that just fool along."

"Yes, I suppose that is true," said the other thoughtfully, a little comforted about his own

poverty, as Kortum, perhaps, had intended he should be.

"Now, if I were rich," continued Kortum, "I should resist all that modern affectation. It wouldn't touch me. I should use my money, as intended, rationally, for myself."

"That's why you don't get it."

"That, if correct—which it isn't (look around you!)—would only prove what a blind idiot is Fortune. Spending money is a far better way of diffusing it than giving it—far more beneficial to the community. All this talk about charity, luxury, the simpler life, is rubbish, economically and socially unsound."

"Old Ostlar made all his money for himself, and kept it to himself, and now he is leaving it behind him," moralized the older man, the poorer man, the man with children.

"What we need," said Kortum, not heeding him, "is to get away from all this maudlin controlling of each other's actions. The whole world just now is conscience to its neighbour. We want to get back to 'Every man for himself, and the State to see fair play.'"

"Well, that's a generous attitude, at any rate, in a man as—unwealthy as yourself. The social conscience of most of us have-nots is just wanting to get at the haves."

Kortum laughed. "I treat of these things theoretically," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am really quite happy as I am. The work's interesting enough, though one abuses it, and

I've always a spare coin for a cigar or a drink, to a friend. Yes, I'm happy enough. I should be awfully bored, say, with a large business, or as a thieving lawyer, or in a dozen other positions that one sees men happy in. A thousand a year and Italy; that's my ideal. Old Ostlar set me thinking about rich and poor."

"But why should the thought of him put you out?"

Kortum reflected a moment. "Why shouldn't I tell you? It's really of little importance. You were saying he had no known relatives. But you've heard, I suppose, of his friend?"

"No. Who was he?"

"Dear me, I thought everybody knew about that business. How we exaggerate our own importance! Well, it's long ago. For the first quarter of a century of their lives, Ostlar and my father, living side by side in the same village, and then, working together in the same foreign surroundings, were inseparable comrades. At the age of fifteen they ran away from home to the same ship. They slept together in the same berth a-top of each other; they used to lie under alternate nights. As a grown man, Ostlar fell violently in love with a young woman; he worked long for her, got engaged to her; then my father stole her away from him. I'm afraid my father—didn't behave very well. But my mother was worth it. She told Ostlar she couldn't love any one but my father. He never spoke to either of them again, nor took any

farther notice of them. They tried several times to make up, but he never answered."

"Probably he couldn't trust himself. It was better so," said Hackner, with a sympathetic whiff of his pipe.

"I dare say. But you know, he grew into a dreadful old curmudgeon; his temper was awful. All his workpeople hated him, I believe. When I was born, they—my parents—asked him to let bygones be bygones, and come and stand godfather. That was the only time he ever took any notice or made any reply."

"What did he do?" asked the other with interest.

"Sent them the will, torn across, which he had made before his engagement, in his early days, by which he left the little he then possessed to my mother—or to my father, if she died without heirs."

Hackner, the worn man with the kindly eyes, looked straight in front of him, and, as the silence deepened, he remarked: "It was hardly judicious, perhaps, however well meant—that asking him to be your godfather."

"I suppose not. But, you see, I seem to have missed somehow being, either by my mother or my father, old Ostlar's ultimate heir."

"In rather a topsy-turvy manner—don't you think?"

Kortum broke into a peal of merriment. "Well, yes. I didn't mean to be literal. Talking of money, do you know the Chief told me the other day he was going to raise my salary?"

"He ought to have done it long ago. They have been underpaying you for years."

"Do you think so? I'm so glad you think so! If it has to be one or the other—and I suppose it mostly has—I for one would much rather be under- than over-paid. At least"—and again he laughed—"I would much rather have my friends, my *colleagues*, take that view." And then they talked on of "the Shop," as they called it—the office of the great morning and evening daily, with the incessant worry through most hours of the twenty-four. They talked on, as men do who have great part of their life in common; dozens of petty interests cropping up along the road, as they talked on.

"Please, sir, you're wanted at the telephone," said a noiseless waiter at Kortum's elbow.

"Nine o'clock!" cried Hackner, at the same time, rising. "Dear me, I must hurry home."

Kortum had taken up a review. "It's only my landlady," he said, "wanting to know whether she must still keep my dinner. I had told her I should dine at home to-night. Just speak to her as you go down, will you?—that's a good fellow!—and tell her I shan't dine at all."

"For a man who is going to live in luxury some day, you are wonderfully abstemious at present," said Hackner.

"I should go to my dinner fast enough if it were a particularly good one." He settled himself in his deep leather chair. "It is the thought that one will *never* be able to command a very

much better meal which is so depressing; it keeps one from enjoying this."

"Fie, Kortum! And just now you were saying you were contented——"

Kortum looked up from his "Quarterly" with the shine in his dark eyes that every one who knew him liked. "Are you always consistent?" he said. "Besides, if I may say so, I shouldn't care about ordering the banquet unless I could get somebody to share it." He had not read many pages of an article on Labour Colonies in Roumania when Hackner once more stood between him and the light.

"It's not your landlady who wants you," he said, "but Rosberg, the lawyer."

"Well, what does he want? I don't know him. I suppose I must go." Kortum rose.

"He asked whether you could come round to see him. I said you would, unless I telephoned afresh."

"I don't know where he lives. Somewhere on the Heerengracht?"

"Yes. He gave the number—eighty-seven. Well, good night. I must get home to my wife."

"Good night. I suppose it is some tiresome charity business. But they won't get me on to any more of their committees. I had enough of the last."

Meditating on the follies and iniquities of charity bazaars, concerts, and balls, Hans Kortum started for the Heerengracht. It was a bitterly cold winter evening. The east wind whistled

along the blackness of the gloomy streets. People hurried past, wrapped close, as if eager to get away from the weather. At a corner a child held out its hand. "Get away!" said Hans; "it's very wrong to beg." The child ran beside him whining. "Get away!" he said; "it's very wrong to give to beggars." The child ran beside him whining. He gave it a silver piece. He turned on to the Heerengracht, which is a sombre, a stately, a cold canal. He passed one of the biggest mansions upon it, and looked up at the dead stone front. "Old Ostlar's house," he said to himself. "I must be getting near the lawyer's number." He looked under the next street lantern. Ninety-nine. He retraced his steps. Eighty-seven was Old Ostlar's.

He rang; the bell sounded away into the hollow stillness with a foolishly persistent clang. The whole front of the house was dark. After a wait there approached a feeble shuffling, bolts were drawn back, and by the light of a flickering candle, an old woman appeared in a great empty marble hall.

"This—this is not Mr. Rosberg's?" said Kortum, lamely. "Could you direct me where he lives?"

"It's all right, sir," replied the old crone in a shrill voice. "Are you Mr. Kortum? Come in. He is waiting to speak to you." And she flung open a heavy oak door and stood aside.

Hans Kortum entered a lofty dining-room, the walls of which were covered with Italian

landscape, over oaken wainscotting, in the Dutch manner of the eighteenth century. Unlike the hall, this handsome room was well lighted by Japanese bronze oil-lamps, and on one half of the broad table silver and glass had been laid out for a meal. A decanter of wine stood there, and the lawyer had helped himself to its contents.

"Yes," said Rosberg, a little old notary, with a brisk, impertinent manner, "I had to speak to you at once, and it was best we should meet here. Old Ostlar is dead. Did you know him?"

"No," replied Kortum.

"So much the simpler. Well, he has left you all his money."

"Good Heavens!"

"You may well say so. So should I, if Providence had acted so well by me; but it hasn't. He has made you not only his sole heir, but his executor. I have the will here"—he leant with his hand on a long blue document. "There are one or two things you must do to-night, and do here. That's why I asked you to come round."

"Can I read the will?" asked Hans.

"By all means. Shall I read it to you?"

"I think, if you don't mind, I should like to read it by myself."

"By all means," replied the lawyer, offended. "Well, yes; he says a thing or two—but I dare say you will understand. Would you like to do everything else by yourself, too?"

"Is there anything very special?"

"Well, perhaps not to-night. There will be formalities to-morrow. But he wishes you to stay in the house to-night." The lawyer replenished his glass. "It is perhaps hardly a festive occasion. Still, you must allow me to drink to your good fortune, Mr. ——"

"Oh, not to-night! Not here!" cried Hans.

The lawyer emptied his glass in silence. Then he said: "It's a very fair claret," wished Kortum a curt "Good night," and took his leave.

Hans sat down in the nearest chair—a fine old bit of flowered Utrecht velvet—and stared around like a man demented. In the deadly silence he gazed at the splendid room, and then at the bit of blue paper which, the lawyer had said, gave all this to him. All this? A great deal more. He was one of the richest men in the town.

Then he thought of the dead man lying upstairs, with whom he had never exchanged a word in his life, whom he only knew by sight. He supposed he must go and see him now, for the last time—near, for the first—a curious thrill of unwillingness ran through him. The lawyer had said there were things he must do at once. He drew the document towards him.

It was simply worded. It said that Hans Kortum's mother had been the hope and the joy and the ruin of Ostlar's life. He could not forgive her and he could not leave off loving her. He told this to her son. And after her death, her husband being dead also—only a few years

ago—the old man had made this will, leaving all he possessed to her only child.

He asked Hans to come, immediately upon the news of his death, into the house no Kortum had ever entered, and not to leave it till after the funeral. “I have lived alone ; I shall die alone,” he wrote. He was evidently anxious that his heir should protect the remains and see that they were treated decently. Moreover, he asked him to burn, unread, within twelve hours, a parcel of letters, and to place on the dead breast, before it was cold, a portrait and a lock of hair.

Kortum rang at once. The old woman conducted him to the death-chamber. It was a sombre room, with green hangings. He stood looking at the cold, yellow face. In an *escritoire* he found the things as described ; he recognised the girl-portrait of his mother. At the moment when he took the keys from the dead man’s table, he felt that the change in his own life came true. By the light of his solitary candle he crept downstairs again. He remembered now that old Ostlar had taken over this whole house, with all the furniture, in a bankruptcy which he himself had brought about. He had lived in it with the old charwoman-housekeeper and a slavey.

In the dining-room he found the old woman placing several dishes, cold, all of them—an aspic, a French *pâté*, a fruit jelly—a luxurious, if somewhat peculiar repast. “*He* said I was to get them from the pastry-cook’s for you,” remarked the old woman. “He told me to spend twenty

florins on them. He must have been wandering in his mind. But I done it. He never spent five on a meal for himself in his life."

Something rose up in Hans Kortum's throat and choked him for a moment. It was all the mourning old Ostlar had.

Hans ate some of the good things, and that cleared his mind wonderfully. He leant back in his chair and surveyed the situation.

Well, he was rich now, suddenly rich beyond his wildest dreams. A little too rich, he was afraid, but he mustn't mind that. He could do all he had ever wanted to do. And he had written his last unwilling article! Oh, joy! he had written his last unwilling article!

Within a fortnight he would leave for Italy; would leave all his old, murky world behind him; would leave, and begin a new life. At last he would enjoy to the full his long pent-up love for all that is beautiful. Here, in this northern city, everything was ugly. Oh, yes, of course, there were a few beautiful pictures in the Museum, and you could occasionally hear very beautiful music. But that does not make life beautiful. The city itself was monstrous, the streets, the shops, the clothes, the factories—everything he could think of—the faces, the climate (winter and summer), the ideals, the conversations, the money-making, the vulgar newspapers. Especially the newspapers. All life was a persistent nightmare of ugliness and vulgarity. In a fortnight he would be away from it all.

His eyes rested on the temples and nymphs of the painted landscape around him. The walls of the room were a blaze of sunlight and a maze of revelry. In this way the old seventeenth-century Dutchmen endeavoured to escape from the grey platitude of their daily lives. Soon he would be amidst the real thing. Dear me, these Italian landscapes were very well done ; so well, they really might be Moucherons. He took up a lamp to examine them. What a sensuous delight of colour and movement ! What happiness ! What a joy of living, unknown in these latitudes ! He wondered—were they Moucherons ? Admirably done.

And suddenly a desire seized him to discover what other treasures the house possessed that had now become his. What was behind those two finely carved folding-doors ? He flung them open, and stood, lamp in hand, on the threshold of a white and gold Louis XV. saloon. The furniture and hangings were dark blue and silver silk. Against the walls hung a number of pictures in gilt frames. Modern art, as he saw at a glance. He advanced towards the nearest. An Israels ! The great living Dutch painter of pathos in humble life. A poor woman by an empty cradle in the grey sorrow of the lonely room.

He went on quickly to the next. A fisher-woman by her open door, looking out to the stormy sea. An Israels. A very fine one. Full of subdued anguish and stress in sea and sky. The next. Two old peasants in the dull, drab

cottage at their all too scanty meal. Under this a title: "Their Daily Crust." He stood looking at it a long time; as he turned away, his eyes were soft. He remembered now having heard that the man on whom Ostlar had foreclosed had been a great art connoisseur, and had wasted his money buying pictures. Why, every one of these paintings must now be worth many thousands of pounds!

Another large picture arrested him as he turned. A splendid thing. A sick child in the cupboard-bedstead at the side; in the middle, father and mother by the table, his pockets inside out, a few coppers on the board. And near to this another sadly simple, impressive scene. A young man, neat and poor, in front of a closed door, in the dark drizzle, turning away, looking straight at you with despair in his eyes. Under this also a title, though unnecessary: "No Work." The whole room seemed to be hung with Israels; the pinched poverty stared out too terribly against the mass of heavy gilding and brocade.

He went back to the dining-room and sat for a long time thoughtful, his head between his hands. He must spend the whole night in this house, by the dead man's will. He had no wish to go to bed; he knew he would not sleep. When he lifted his face, his eyes were still full of the pictures in the dark room behind him. He did not see the Italian landscapes. "It is a beautiful emotion!" he said, and laughed at

himself. And he went back to the pictures again and spent another hour with them.

At midnight a knock came to the dining-room door, startling him. A man entered, evidently an artisan of the most superior class.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the man. "I understand you are the new master. I arranged with the housekeeper to watch here while she lay down."

"Oh, yes, quite right. But how do you mean—master? Are you"—Kortum looked dubious—"a servant of——?"

The man smiled. "I've been foreman at the paper-mills for thirty years," he said.

"Oh, of course! The paper-mills!" exclaimed Kortum.

"Begging your pardon, sir, this is a very important event for all of us, sir. There's eight hundred hands at the paper-mills."

"Eight hundred hands!" exclaimed Kortum.

"And, if I might be so bold as to say it, sir"—he paused; then, with an effort: "It's a very anxious moment for us." Kortum did not answer. "You'll forgive me, sir, if I can't keep silence. The—mills will be kept on?"

"Doubtless. Of course. I shall sell them."

"God help us, if that be true!"

"What do you mean? You'll probably get as good a master as you've lost."

The old foreman shook his head. "May I speak, sir, to-night, while there's time?"

"Speak, if you like," answered Kortum. "Sit

down!" With a respectful movement the old man declined this invitation.

"You can't sell the mills, sir, and that's the truth. You can only close them. My old master was not an easy man to get on with—he was soured, somehow; but he had his soft side, sharp man of business as he was, and he was terribly just. I could get on with him, though I say it myself, and he'd often talk over matters with me, having been with him all his life, that even the gentlemen in the office didn't quite know the rights of. Well, sir, he'd made a power of money out of the mills, but in the last years they didn't even pay their expenses. 'It's my own fault, Brest,' he would say to me; 'I can't put in the new improvements. I'm too old. We must rub on like this now; it isn't for long.' He knew he was breaking up."

"Well, the new man will put in the new improvements."

"No, he won't, sir. There's too much to do. It wouldn't be worth any man's while to buy the mills."

"Then we must close them. I am going to live in Italy."

"There's eight hundred hands, sir. And master, he said to me: 'The new master must work the business up. There's plenty of ready money to keep it going and put it right.' He didn't say who the new master would be, sir, but 'He's a young man,' he says, 'and energetic, and he's chosen an occupation that you have to be

quick in and sharp. And I see his name down in charity committees, so, you see, he cares about the people. He'll probably have all the new-fangled notions about libraries and pensions, Brest ; so he'll be a better master than I. I hope and believe he will,' says master, with such a break in his voice that I stood up to him. 'Why, you've kept the mills going at a loss, for the people, all these years,' says I. 'And what business is that of yours?' says master—he was like that. 'Ain't I one of the richest men in this city? Didn't I make all my money out of my mills?' says he. There, sir, now I've told you all. God forgive me if I was wrong."

"Did your master tell you to tell me?" demanded Kortum, shading his face.

"No, sir—but he didn't tell me not to tell you."

"There is no need of the mills. Why, the pictures in the next room alone must be worth far more money than I shall ever want."

"The pictures of the poor people, sir?"

"But I couldn't manage mills."

"There's very good men in the office, sir. Old master, he had a wonderful gift of selecting men, so I thought we must be all right in his selecting you as his heir. He only turned away one manager once. 'He's a genius,' says he to me; 'they're the only sort you can't use in a business. Beg your pardon, are you a genius, sir?'"

"No. There isn't a word of all this in the

will. He expressly says what he wishes me to do."

"About the mills, sir?"

"No, about other matters. Eight hundred hands at the mills?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a splendid vocation."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Look here, you had better leave me alone now. I am going to Italy for a couple of months with a friend. After that, I suppose I shall come back here."

He motioned the man away. Then he went back to the white and gold saloon, and closed the door upon himself and the pictures, passing slowly from one to the other, and harking back.

THE DEATH-WAY

THE one old man sat by the bed, and the other lay in it. Neither spoke a word.

Ten minutes passed, and more. They remained thus together, almost immovable. The one old man sat by the bed, his head sunk forward, his underlip protruding: both hands were folded upon his stick. The other lay staring, as it seemed, at nothing, his crumpled shirt unloosened about his scraggy neck. Around his hollow face the ragged hairs streamed wide.

"You're in a bad way," said, at last, the old man in the chair.

He in the bed stared steadily on. "You've said that before," he answered; "'twas the last thing that you said."

"Well—it's true."

"I'd like a bit of news," retorted the invalid, "I can find out about the way I'm in, for myself."

"You might be civiller, Jan," objected his visitor, "to a man that's come near on two mile, to see ye."

"It ain't more'n one and a half," said the sick man, "nor as much."

"And his best milker off her feed."

The invalid wriggled himself round in a

series of jerks. "Off her feed?" he cried. "Which is it? Liza?"

The other shook his long head up and down. "Liza," he said. "Something's gone wrong in her innards. *She* can't tell what."

"Have ye had the vet.?"

"Pooh, the vet. ! If a cow could speak, she'd soon let a vet. know what a fool he is. The old woman can't tell. It was her as I meant."

"Cows is cows," replied the invalid and lay back a long time, thinking. Presently he remarked: "I had a cow went like that, seventeen years ago, come next Midsummer. Nobody knew what ailed her. She went about bellowing all day."

"Liza doesn't bellow," interposed the visitor. The other took no notice of the interruption.

"She'd stand in a ditch for hours, and low, with her feet in the water. To hear her like that, loud and long, it was like the psalm-singing in church."

"Did she get over it?" asked the visitor, anxious for Liza.

"She died. And when we opened her, we found the old woman's church-book that had been missing. So that explained it." He sank back with the effort of all this conversation, and, in fact, "the old woman" had already come forward to the bed.

"It's time you were going, neighbour," she began. "The doctor says as he mayn't talk above more than a minute or two." Her husband

broke into an angry gurgle. "And not get into one of his rages," added the old woman hastily, "or the doctor says as he'll burst something, and that'll be the end of him."

"D—— the doctor," said the invalid amiably. The visitor had risen solemnly and shuffled to the door. "There's more chance of the doctor doing that to you than you to the doctor," he remarked, with an ugly chuckle. "By the by, I forgot to tell you, the young Baron has altered the direction of the Death-Way."

Both husband and wife gave utterance to a cry of astonished dismay.

"He's making a new garden and a play-game place close to the Castle," continued the visitor, "and so he's blocked up the Death-Way, and carried it round straight to the highway. Round to the right, you know, by the clump of larches"—both listeners nodded—"yes, that's what he's been and done."

"To think of it!" said the old woman, with uplifted hands. Moved the Death-Way! Lord! Lord! To think what the rich may do!"

The sick man struck the coverlet. "D—— it, he can't!" cried the sick man. "There's not a power in the land could move the Death-Way: the Queen couldn't do it! I've heard my old father say a hundred times, that the Death-Way was here long afore there wàs any such thing as a King."

"'Tis as old as Death, belike," suggested the visitor, standing by the door.

The woman nodded. "He can't do it," repeated the sick man, nodding also. "I'm eighty-three, come next Christmas, and my father was eighty-seven, when he went, in harvest-time, and neither of us has known of a man, woman, or child that died in this hamlet but was carried along the Death-Way to Overbeek churchyard. Lord! How was we to be buried, if he moves the Death-Way? Answer me that?" He half-lifted himself in the bed.

"We shall have to go round," replied the more laconic visitor. The old woman seemed suddenly to have reverted to the peril from which the great tidings had diverted her. "Ye'll be taken along quick enough, if ye go on like this!" she cried, turning to the bed. "Doesn't the doctor tell ye every time he comes that ye'll kill yourself by moving about?"

"He'll have to go round," said the visitor, who had passed through the door.

The words infuriated the invalid. "Never," he shouted, regardless of his wife. "Here, Jan! Piet! where are the boys?"

"Gone to the pigs," replied the wife. "They'll be back in a minute or two. There was a butcher from Wyk——"

"What, and they never told me? How much did he offer? Do they think I'm dead already? No, not by ten years yet. I've a better constitution than my father. Look here, how much did you say?"

"Why, he was only a-come to have a look at

them. You'll hear all about it. Lie still, father, do, and don't talk!"

"How can I not talk about the Death-Way? And as for not moving!—I wonder how much he'll offer. Pork is dear just now. He ought to offer twenty-two cents!" He looked round at her with eager, wistful eyes. "D'ye think he'll offer twenty-two cents?"

"No," she said, walking across to the fire, and removing the kettle. "Pigs is down."

The old man gave a faint howl. "Like my luck!" he said. "I've never sold yet, that some other man didn't, sooner or later, sell dearer. It might be twenty-one and a half now, don't you—oh! oh! oh!" He sat up in bed, bent double with internal suffering, his face grew livid.

The wife ran up to him. "Deary! Deary me! Is it one of your spasms?" she cried.

His pains prevented his answering: they increased upon him: she hurried to and fro in the chamber. "It's all your fault," she said several times, "a-twisting yourself in the bed!"—he was in too great pain to reply. He lay forward, alternately moaning and shrieking. So the doctor found him, a few minutes later. The doctor frowned.

"What's he been doing, Vrouw Putters?" demanded the doctor. "Jan Putters, who's to blame for this?"

"He is," replied the wife. "He's been fussing and fuming about the Death-Way, as if he was a-going to be taken along it to-morrer!"

Then, suddenly, she began to cry. "He don't even abuse me, doctor," she sobbed. "He can't get to do it. Lord, what a bad way he must be in!"

"He is in a bad way," assented the doctor, who had been removing the patient's bandages. "His—Heavens, man, hadn't I told you to lie still for your life? Are you mad that you want to kill yourself, Jan Putters?"

"No, nor to be killed by a doctor," retorted the sick man, between his moanings.

"Well, I shall have to have a try at that, all the same," replied the doctor roughly. "I must take immediate measures, or you haven't a day to live."

The wife shrieked pitiful protests: the old man turned his head angrily in her direction.

"Have ye never heard doctors' talk before?" he gasped. "I've a better constitution than my—father——" Through the half-open door his two stalwart sons came in, with awkward vigour and a smell of the damp outside. "Boys," he stammered, "neighbour Lops has been here. Liza's gone like me. There's something wrong in her innards." Then he fell back, gurgling: the sweat stood on his brow.

"You must help me," said the doctor to the sons, "and be quick!" They were clumsy: they did their best. No deftness of doctor or assistants could have saved the sick man agonies of suffering. When at last the operation was completed, he lay like one more dead than alive.

"And what do you think now, doctor?" questioned the anxious wife, by the door.

"He may pull through," replied the man of science. His tone was very serious: he put up his little case.

"If he doesn't move?"

"If he doesn't move, of course. He has brought this last crisis upon himself."

The patient faintly opened one eye. "I hear you," he whispered audibly. "My constitution——" he could get no farther. From sheer fatigue he lay silent through two long hours, while the twilight gradually glimmered into gloom.

Then he moved his head and called—in a murmur—for his eldest, Jan.

"Lift me up!" he said, as his son bent over him.

"Lord, father, didn't you hear the doctor say——!"

"Lift me up!" The son had never, during fifty years of his life, disobeyed that voice: he could not begin now.

"D'ye believe in doctors?" continued the father with a sneer. "As well believe in vets. I don't need a doctor to tell me how I feel. I've got something to say. Turn the old 'ooman out."

As if she heard them, the wife glanced across from some mess she was concocting for the invalid. "Ye must die, if ye want to," she said.

"Tell her the chicks are running loose!" whispered the old man.

"Mother, you go out!" said the son. He faced her with a heavy air of command. She looked him silently in the eyes and did as he bade her.

The old man chuckled feebly. "You're a chip of the old block," he said. "Look here, Jan, doctor or no doctor, want or want not, my time's come." The son would have objected, but old Jan stopped him. "D'ye think I thought I was going to live for ever?" he asked.

"Your constitution——" began the son.

"Something's gone in my innards: I've a-felt it going. The farm's very small and poor, but I done my best. I've nothing left to say to you or Piet. You'll find a little money in the Bank. Now, you must take me up and carry me into the State Chamber. I mean to die where my father and my grandfather died."

"I can't, father: it's murder."

"Ye can't murder a dying man, ye fool! Stay; call Piet, so they can say it was both of you!"

Piet came and, between them, the brothers carried their light yet clumsy burden, shuffling, across the little passage. Half-way, stood the old woman, lamenting. The old man took no notice, breathing short, in loud gaspings of pain.

They stumbled into the "State Chamber"—the Best Room, close and stuffy with unused furniture and excluded sunlight, as such rooms are apt to become. It was dark and sombre-looking. The great black and brown cabinet shone dully in the half-light beneath its weight of delf. In the wall was an oaken cupboard-bed,

with panelled doors and green damask curtains : into this the brothers sank their burden as best they could.

For a long time Jan Putters lay there tortured. The sons stood, lumpish, beside the bed. The mother had come in, trembling.

At last he opened his eyes. "Draw the blinds up!" he whispered. "I want to see the old place once more."

There was not much light left, even when they had let in all they could. From where he lay, he could just see the front of the "new" barn, now ten years old.

"'Tis a good building," he said, aloud. "I should like to see a couple of the cows again, just for once. I've been ill a long time, a week. I've missed the cows. I should like to see a cow again before I go where there ain't any. I don't seem to mind so much any longer which I see."

All this he had spat out, with great labour, in faint jerks. The two brothers looked at each other: the younger stole from the room and, presently, in the falling night, a massive grey shape appeared beyond the nearer window. It stood there impassive at first: then, disconcerted, it broke into a melancholy roar.

"He's chosen 'White Bess,'" said the elder son, "so you could see her better."

"Take her away. She don't want to stay there," replied the dying man.

Then he lifted his scraggy grey head again and hissed, amid suppressed catches of pain:

"Call Piet! Call him quick! Call!" The weeping woman ran out.

"D—— her crying," said the old man, "but I can't do it to her face, as it's for me. It's the first time, Jan, that I cannot damn your mother for doing what I don't want her to."

In spite of his eagerness he lay unable to speak to them for more than a quarter of an hour, after the mother had returned with Piet. It was fully dark now outside: a candle stood ghastly, behind the bed.

When at last he again found strength and breath, it was to say:

"Boys, come here!"

They bent over him, catching at his words.

"I'm a-lying here a-dying," he whispered solemnly, "in the same place and same bed as my father did, and his father afore him. I ought to have had at least five years more, but there's something gone wrong in my innards and here am I a-dying in the State Chamber as I ought to be. It might have hurt less, but that can't be helped. Some pigs squeal a great deal more'n others. I'm glad I'm a-dying in the State Chamber, boys." His eyes wandered round the splendours of the apartment, in the flare of the shaky candle. "Your turn now," he said.

The two sons, both grizzly haired, bowed their heads towards him. They watched him, as he lay there, far into the night. The mother busied herself about such poor nursing as lay within her scope. Once or twice he cursed her

feebly, not unkindly, for doing something awkwardly, or for doing it at all. His sufferings were continuous.

Shortly before the end, he beckoned his two sons down close to his lips. "Swear that you'll take me along the old Death-Way," he murmured. "Swear."

They hesitated, looked at each other, stammered that the Baron was making changes, that the road now went round by the clump of——

"Swear!" he reiterated. "I can't die till I know that I'm going as my father went. It's the road that we've always took. The Baron can't change it. I—the Death-Way—the—I—swear—swear!"

"We swear," said the sons.

"So help me—how does it go?"

"God," said the sons.

An hour later he muttered something about the price of pigs, and at three o'clock, in the first chill change of the darkness, he said distinctly: "My constitution," and died.

The doctor came just before breakfast. "I told you so," said the doctor. They spoke little, being Dutch peasants; but the widow, looking askance from her coffee-pot, asked mildly if any one had been in any way to blame.

"Everybody except myself," replied the doctor promptly. "Imagine his being moved to another room after what I'd said—and done—last night! You've killed him, and he's killed himself."

"We never didn't do what he told us to do,"

expostulated the widow. "We couldn't have begun the day afore he died." And she commenced crying.

"Well, well," said the doctor, "what you've got to do now is to make arrangements about the funeral." He found them not easy to manage, from sheer inertness. They had never, any of them, during the last half-century, initiated anything—taken any step that had not been pointed out to them; the sons had remained unmarried because he had never told them to propose to any particular girl. It was impossible for them to realise, as they stood by the dead man, that they must now give orders, and begin by giving them about him.

The doctor helped them, and the parson, and the notary. In all proposals that were made to them they reasonably acquiesced. They went about their farm duties as if nothing had happened. The daily round of duties engrossed their interest: it was diversified rather pleasantly than otherwise by the mild excitement of exhibiting the corpse to every neighbour that called.

On the day of the funeral relations and acquaintances assembled in considerable numbers. For, next to a wedding, a funeral is the most gratifying public occurrence in the dulness of a peasant's daily existence. Compared to a funeral a christening is quite third-rate. There is no thrill connected with a christening.

The two rooms were full of mourners, a prominent place being occupied by the "weepers,"

amazing old hags in black cloaks and black head-cloths, relations, expressly invited to weep. The widow sat beside her sons, at the top of the "State Chamber," perfunctorily pretending to listen to the minister, and frowning with annoyance whenever one of the weepers stopped weeping to take breath. The sons said "Yes" and "No" to everybody, occasionally wrong. They both fetched a sigh of relief when the head-mute appeared in the doorway, announcing thereby that the procession must get ready to start. In old peasant fashion the coffin was placed upon the dead man's waggon, a black pall spread neatly over the waggon's gaily painted sides. The "weepers," swathed in black, were hoisted on top of it. The male mourners came behind in rusty beaver hats, twice the height of our modern ones, with enormous crape streamers that hung limp in the still air.

Slowly the little company went wending up across the sand-heath. The heavy road lay white before them, enclosed in far masses of purple bloom. Above, shone the sun with few clouds around him. The landscape was desolate: only once or twice a rabbit stopped, inquisitive, and fled.

In the loose sand the horses strained and stumbled. The mourners straggled, two and two, with a peasant's unsteady gait. The two sons came, behind the waggon, close, their countenances set.

From the open heath the road crept into

brushwood ; then it wound into fir-plantations and so into the beech-woods of a park. The hush of tall stems and full foliage fell upon it. In silence and shadows the little company plodded on.

Suddenly, the white path came to a stop, almost with a jerk as it were, cut off, dead, by a dry ditch, a small embankment, a sharp curve into loose brown soil. On the top of the low earth-wall, thrown up from the newly dug trench, a white board fronted the advancing peasants: "No Thoroughfare. Trespassers will be prosecuted." The head-mute, some few steps in advance, came to a halt, in a twinkling of doubt ; then he swerved to the right, where the freshly hewn trunks lay scattered on both sides of the still uncompleted track.

"Stop !" cried Jan, the elder son, in a voice that rang up to the green canopy above.

"Straight ahead !" he continued, pointing through the board. "The Death-Way !" He had left his place behind the waggon, coming forward, his brother following close. The cart stopped : all the little band stood immovable in their places, not understanding, as yet.

"But the road has been altered by the Baron," expostulated the undertaker. "It now runs——"

"The Death-Way lies *yonder* !" said Jan. He ran to the horses' heads and hoarsely summoned the old women to get down, which they did, tumbling over each other with surprising

agility. Then, calling to his single farm-servant, who was driving, to sit tight, and to Piet, and a couple of cousins, to steady the coffin, he deliberately dragged the struggling animals down into the deep furrow, for it was little more, and up again, with a great creaking and hoisting of the wheels and their load, over the low earth-work to the other side. By main force he did it. Then he shook himself, taking breath, and quietly patted the horse nearest him. "So ho!" he said. Piet, having given a tug at the pall, to straighten it, came and stood beside his brother.

All the others stared curiously and shuffled. Some hung back, glancing at each other, uncertain.

"Those of you as want to turn back may turn," called Jan. "I'm a-going to take my father to his grave by the way that his father went."

"Yes, by G——!" said Piet.

Then, ashamed before each other, they all came over the ditch, some jumping, some tumbling, as a flight of ravens might swoop down upon a field. For some hundred yards ahead of them the old Way still lay untouched: they moved along it, wondering, till it opened on to a large square of hard gravel, which, although they did not know this, was a new tennis-court, not yet enclosed. Two young girls, who had been playing—white figures—fled as the funeral company broke from among the brushwood upon their startled view. The two brothers advanced: they had taken the place of the terrified

undertaker. Their heavy peasant faces were carved in stone: they kicked aside a couple of balls, without seeing them, till they stood before the tennis-net, nonplussed, for a moment only: then Jan, now unable to act otherwise, stooped and with a steady descent of his long, sharp knife, sawed the net asunder. It fell away on both sides: the waggon and its load scrunched on. Behind it sank its two big ruts, across the ruined court.

So they went straight ahead, and down the central alley of the newly planned rose-garden. And at the end of this they met the Baron's sunbonneted babies in their donkey-cart, and the young Baron himself on horseback beside his children.

He rode up to them at once, as they came steadily towards him: the small creatures in the low carriage held back, staring, alarmed at the collection of black scarecrows, the great black-clothed waggon, with the dreadful creatures a-top. The prosperous donkey cropped up his ears.

"And what is the meaning of this?" imperiously demanded the Baron. He looked very handsome and important, in his leggings, on his showy bay mare.

Jan Putters and Piet Putters stood opposite him. They drew their tall hats over their eyebrows. "We are burying our father," they said together. "By the old Death-Way," added Jan.

"But you knew I had altered the road! You

saw the notice. By George, you've come right across the tennis-court! I'll have you prosecuted! I——"

"Mynheer the Baron has no right to alter it," said Jan, while all the others gathered round. "The Death-Way belongs to us all: it is older than any Kings or Barons."

"No, Mynheer the Baron has no right," chimed in Piet, coming to his brother's assistance. The others—the most courageous of them—muttered approval.

"Right? No right? I have an absolute right!" exclaimed the astonished Baron. "There was no right of way of any kind, if you go talking of rights!" His irritated steed sprang aside. The babies screamed: the Baroness came round to them out of a shrubbery.

Another mother had also joined her children: the old woman had clambered down from her perch on the coffin and stood trembling, by the Baron, between her sons.

"You've ruined my new plantation!" shouted the Baron, endeavouring to steady his horse. "I'll summon you! You shall pay for the damage, every halfpenny!"

"The damage?" replied Jan, and cast a scornful glance upon the tract behind him. "For that we will pay, if necessary, poor as we are. We can pay for it"—he turned to his mother—"with the things that are in the State Chamber—and, if Mynheer the Baron has a right to stop up the Death-Way, the Law must decide, but it is not

so ; only there is another law for the rich and another for the poor."

"Right! You shall hear of my right!" cried the Baron. He drew up his careering steed straight across the path of the little band.

"So be it, Mynheer the Baron!" said Jan. "But yonder, behind you, is the end of the Death-Way. Let us carry our dead to the churchyard."

The Baron's horse stood where it stood, with arched neck and waving tail.

The old woman, the widow, had stolen away to the Baroness with eager entreaty. "Let me bury my dead in peace!" she pleaded. "Oh, if it were he you were carrying away, and you I! I have loved him and obeyed him faithfully for nigh on sixty years. It was his last command, high-born lady, I must obey it."

"What can I do? It was very wrong," answered the young Baroness, with tears in her eyes.

Then, still that appeal in her face under the grim, nunlike veiling, the old woman took the great lady timidly by the hand, as the children nestled closer, and, faltering at first, but with increase of purpose, led her and the children up to the Lord of the Manor, on his horse, across the path. As his wife and his little ones came close to him, he fell back : the woman passed, and the little procession, the coffin with the silent, draped figures upon it, the straggling mourners, the curious mutes, closed in and passed too.

TUBERCULIN

THE cow was slowly wandering across the sunlit field. She flicked her tail to and fro as she munched the faded grass. Up here among the hills the food was not what a first-rate cow would order ; this one remembered very different pastures not more than six weeks ago. But cows cannot state their wants, like human beings, and even when known, those wants, as sometimes with human beings, are scarcely attended to. The grass was the best that the neighbourhood provided. The cow appeared to chew it contentedly, but that may have been a human mistake. At any rate, she chewed it again. She was certainly unaware of the notice she was attracting. She chewed. And she stalked on, flicking her tail. There was grass, of a kind, to chew, and that for a ruminative cow, in a world of flies, is always something. It is said that they ruminate.

"Is she or is she not?" said one of the watchers. Two gentlemen stood by the stile at the bottom of the field, intently contemplating the cow. One of the gentlemen was a young man in spectacles ; the other, somewhat older, wore the habit of a country squire.

Can't you see?" demanded the Squire."

"Most certainly not," replied the doctor.

The cow lifted her head and munched.

"Well, she's consumptive, at any rate," laughed the Squire. The doctor did not laugh. He thought the remark showed a levity bordering on intemperance. The Squire looked a little bit ashamed, and composed his face to meet the seriousness of the subject.

"The fact remains to be faced," said the doctor, "that your dear little daughter refuses to drink her milk boiled, as she ought to do."

"Yes, bother!" said the Squire.

But the doctor corrected him. "It is functional," said the doctor, "a nervous contraction of the trachea. The poor child is quite powerless. In former days many a valuable life has been sacrificed from physical incapacity to swallow a pill."

"Dear me!" said the Squire.

"Our sweet little Anna, then, is physically incapacitated from swallowing boiled milk, yet her constitution imperatively demands a quart of that nourishment per diem."

"Dear, dear!" said the Squire. He would have liked to use some stronger word, but he only flicked his boot.

"Under the circumstances," continued the doctor, "the natural solution presents itself. Sterilise!"

"The cow?" asked the Squire.

"No, the milk."

"Why, that's been tried," exclaimed the Squire impatiently. "The child can't endure it."

"Quite so. Physically incapacitated again."

"That's no good," said the Squire.

"Another means, of course, remains."

"Which?" demanded the Squire.

"Pasteurise."

"Why, that's been tried!" shouted the Squire.

"Quite so. Physically incapacitated again."

For a moment the Squire looked at the doctor, as if some idea of mental incapacity were floating through his kindly, bucolic brain; but soon he reasserted, with a lurch, his respect for the science of which he knew nothing.

"Then," he said a little ruefully, "the child must just drink her milk as Nature sends it her."

The doctor—whose name was Tott—lifted up hands of scientific horror. "Nature!" he repeated, "my *dear* sir! A poor, blind purveyor of microbes! Would you expose your dear little daughter—your only treasure—to the tender mercies of Nature?"

"My wife won't hear of it," said the Squire.

"She is quite right," answered the doctor severely.

"But, good Lord! if the child *must* have milk, and can't drink it sterilised, Pasteurised, boiled, or raw, then how in the name of goodness——"

The doctor held up his appeasing palm. "The resources of science," he said, "are infinite. Have you never heard of Koch's tuberculin?"

"The stuff that doesn't cure consumption? I

should rather think I have. We were at Wiesbaden that winter when the whole hocus-pocus got known. The fearful winter of '90 it was, and all the poor invalids started off for Berlin, and died on the way!"

The doctor half turned aside, with a hand still uplifted that now had become deprecatory.

"Oh, well, well!" he said.

"And those that didn't die couldn't procure any when they got there."

"I don't remember about that," said the doctor.

"And if they did procure it, it didn't do them any good."

"But it has an effect on cows," said Doctor Tott.

The cow looked round at them and slowly winked.

"It may not cure anybody or anything," said Doctor Tott, "but it gives a cow the fever."

"Well, that's something to be thankful for," said the puzzled Squire.

"It is indeed, for by its means we can ascertain whether a cow has tuberculosis or not."

"And cure it, when it has?" said the Squire.

"Oh, no," said the doctor.

"H'm," said the Squire. "Well, what you mean, I suppose, is that if we can make sure the cow is perfectly healthy, then the child can safely drink her milk raw."

"Exactly," said the doctor.

"But typhoid?" ventured the Squire.

"There is no danger of that up here. There

is no risk of anything but tuberculosis, and Koch's tuberculin can settle that."

"Then give her—the cow, I mean—a pill to-day."

The doctor drew himself up, huffy all over, at last. The poor Squire stared at him.

"I am not a veterinary surgeon," said Tott with dignity, "and it isn't—given in pills."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," said the Squire.

"I will communicate with the proper person," continued Tott, "and the proper person will make the necessary investigation in the proper way."

"Quite so," said the crestfallen Squire. "Which vet. would you recommend? Keene? I have frequently employed Keene. Good chap. Has picked up a lot of desultory information about horses."

"I have nothing against Keene, but I should advise a younger man," replied Tott. "One of the men from the College. Veterinary teaching has wonderfully improved during the last ten years. It is now fairly scientific. Say Larkin. I should recommend Larkin, from Lyme. An intelligent investigator is Larkin."

"What! The young man with half the alphabet behind his name? All right," said the Squire. "And you think this cow will do?"

"I am no judge of cows," replied Dr. Tott. He looked impatiently at his watch. The Squire's wife, full of her own complaints and complainings, and of those of her spoilt little only girl, was the doctor's best permanent investment; but there

are limits, and the jolly, easily puzzled Squire, who never even needed a powder, was not a sympathetic subject anyway—at least, not to Dr. Tott.

Old Keene, the horse-doctor, got on well enough with the Squire, and had even given him a couple of hygienic hints for himself, which proved by their success how much the constitutions of all animals have in common. Dr. Larkin, looking up, recognised this fact. Dr. Tott, looking down, denied it. Denied it, in spite of vivisectionism. “A cow is a cow, and a man is a man,” said Dr. Tott triumphantly. “Not *Doctor* Larkin, I think.”

Mr. Larkin then stood looking at the cow with the Squire, as Dr. Tott had done. The cow yawned. Dr. Tott was not there, and Mr. Larkin breathed freely. He was a smart-looking, bright-faced young man, with a little, yellow moustache and well-fitting clothes. He had to look horsey, so he wore gaiters, and scientific, so he wore spectacles, to his own lasting regret and his young wife's, but he had to, because of Dr. Tott. He had brought the tuberculin and the syringe, and so, under the interested eyes of the Squire and the contemptuous eyes of William, the cow's intimate attendant, he inoculated that quadruped—more contemptuous than William and less interested than her master—with an injection under the right breast.

“Now,” he said, “we shall have to see if her temperature rises. Forty-eight hours sometimes

elapse before that takes place. During the next three days I shall, therefore, come over from Lyme four times a day to take her temperature."

"Whew!" said the Squire. He was wondering, not from a pecuniary, but from the comically puzzled point of view, what his little daughter's scientific cup of milk was going to cost.

"Four times a day!" he repeated. "All the way from Lyme! That seems a lot of trouble."

"Science," responded the vet. almost in the same accents as the doctor, "doesn't ask about trouble. It demands accuracy. Science is accurate, or it is not."

"Yes, oh, yes!" said the Squire.

"And, therefore, in the intervals between my visits some trustworthy person must apply the thermometer. I presume you are—ahem!—to be trusted, my man?"

"No, sir," replied William, alarmed, putting both hands behind him.

"What the devil do you mean?" asked the Squire.

"I'm not to be trusted with that thing, sir," exclaimed William in a frightened voice. "I don't understand about it—no, I don't, sir. And if I popped it in, and it didn't come out again, sir, and Miss Anna was to find the glass in her milk—and they do say as that silver stuff inside is poison, sir—and I couldn't be trusted to do it—and I never was good at figures—and please, sir, I don't understand no more about it than the cow."

"Hold your tongue, stupid!" said his master. "The doctor'll show you how."

"It'll be difficult," said the vet. with a superior smile, "but I'll do my best."

"Nonsense!" said the Squire, frowning good-humouredly. "You've been to school, William, and learnt all these things, as all you people do nowadays. Why, Mr. Larkin, all the Board-school children in the cities, that never saw a cow in their lives, learn the technical names of its three stomachs, and what the three stomachs are for."

"Four stomachs," said Mr. Larkin, and his superior smile grew transcendental, "the rumen, the reticulum——"

"Yes, yes," said the Squire again quite hastily. "I belong to an older generation than William, and I must say I don't see the use of those Latin names—not even for me, and certainly not for the future factory hands. Now be attentive, William. Good day, Mr. ——," and, whistling to his dogs, the Squire walked off.

"You may *call* her stomachs what you like," said William to the vet.; "it don't make any difference to her."

Mr. Larkin looked at the quiet young farm-hand, with the healthy, simple face, and wondered that in a world of sagacious animals human beings should be so dense.

"This," he said, "is a thermometer. You're holding it wrong side up."

"Lor—I beg your pardon!" cried William.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. If you let it drop, it'll break!"

"Lor—will it?" cried William.

"Look here—let me have it again, please. These are figures!"

"Are they? I never was great at figures," said William, shaking his yellow head. "At school, master always said: 'William, you can't even take care of number one.'"

"The Squire said you were to try and understand," cried Larkin.

"So he did," answered William contritely. "I do hope it won't hurt my cow."

"What's her name? Here, Molly! Polly! Bright Eyes!" The vet. started after the retreating quadruped, who had evidently come to the conclusion that the whole proceedings, including the prick, were derogatory to her dignity, and who now marched off, her nose well up in air.

"Her name is Sweet William," replied the cow's faithful caretaker, with conscious pride, as he prepared to follow his charge. "Miss Anna christened her so herself. She said it was her favourite flower."

Not long after, when the vet. had departed, and William sat pensively contemplating the little glass tube, six-year-old Miss Anna wandered into the field, with *her* faithful attendant, Carolina, in her train. Miss Anna's mother had often suggested that there were pretty flowers to pick in more eligible quarters; but Miss Anna, whose early taste for botany must on no account be

crossed, stoutly maintained that no such buttercups were to be found anywhere as in the field where the cow was, whither Carolina therefore carefully conveyed her about the time that William came peeping over the stile.

"What bosh it all is!" said Carolina, as William explained about the cow.

Her swain grinned from ear to ear. "Isn't it 'xtrordinary," he said, "for a man like master, that's had school learning, to be so superstitious as that? He really believes it, too," said William, shaking the yellow head—"believes the vet. can see if the creature is ill or not by putting this little—my! I nearly dropped it!—tube in its mouth."

"Sweet William!" said Carolina, in accents of rapt admiration. She didn't mean the cow. In fact, she had advised the selection of an appropriate appellation for the quadruped, so that she might innocently discourse to Miss Anna of the biped all day. "Do you know what missus said to me this morning, William?" continued Carolina. "It's you, she says, that puts the child's back up against the sterilised milks. Master'd never have thought of that. And it's true, ma'am, I says, and I can't help it. I don't *say* anything, but Miss Anna sees as I couldn't drink them myself. And I couldn't. Pah, the smell! But boiled milk, says missus. Pah, the skins!"

"I wonder," remarked William reflectively, "what'll they do with the poor beast if the vet. says she has got his tubers! D——!"—his fresh

face grew suddenly dark red—"That fellow shan't dispose of her, if he does say so. I can see through his little trick. Taking her off master's hands for a song, and disposing of her to the butchers at Lyme. Oh, no, Mr. Spout!" He added viciously: "She's the best of the lot. She shan't go to the butchers, in any case."

The good-natured Squire, who always, especially after a vehement "No," did what his dependents advised him to do, was at this moment thumping with the handle of his riding-whip, in a frenzy of excitement, at the doctor's dispensary door. At every thump his mare squirmed aside, to the terror of the small boy who held her. "Whoa! Whoa, my girl!" The doctor came out.

"Good heavens, Tott!" cried the Squire, perspiring. "My wife has just told me that she's eliminated—no—what the dickens is the word I want?—elicited from Carolina that she's let Anna drink twice—on two several occasions—of the cow's milk—Sweet William's milk—it's the cow's name. Anna gave it her—*raw*! *Raw*, Tott!"

"It is frequently not fatal," said the doctor.

"I don't mean that. What's done can't be helped. But if we were to find out now—*now*, Tott—that Sweet William's got—what do you call it?—tuberoses—we shouldn't know another happy moment—not one of us! I must shoot the beast before Larkin comes back—shoot her!"

The Squire stamped around; the mare

described vast semicircles on the doctor's gravel ; the little boy bumped about like a ball.

"There's no cause," began the doctor, and his voice—and the smile of his spectacles—were balmy, "for anxiety. Even if the cow should show symptoms of tu-ber-cu-lo-sis, there would be no cause. At present, science is quite uncertain whether tu-ber-cu-lo-sis can be communicated from an animal to man."

"Huh—h—h?" said the Squire.

"There is an influential opinion that it cannot."

The mare gave a bound ; the little boy flew.

"There is another that it can."

"Whoa!" cried the little boy.

"Both may be right."

"Huh—h—h—h—h?" said the Squire.

"Or neither," said Dr. Tott, closing the door as politely as he could, in a farewell bow to his interlocutor. Tott was very busy at the moment. When the impatient visitor flew at the door, the doctor had been half-way through with a roaring ploughboy's rocking tooth. In a country practitioner's experience that sort of thing lasts long. And when he is interrupted, it lasts longer.

The Squire rode home musingly. But he wasn't any clearer by the time he alighted in his own stableyard. He isn't any clearer to-day. Nor is the faculty.

All the same, he heard with satisfaction from William that the thermometer hadn't stirred.

"Leastways, I didn't see it do it," added William, cautiously.

Presently the vet. came bicycling in and careered with the rest of the party after the retreating Sweet William, thermometer in hand.

"However," repeated the vet., "we can say nothing with certainty for the next forty-eight hours. Of course, no one must touch her milk, cooked or otherwise. "Throw it away!"

"Of course, sir," said William, with a mild wink in his mild eye. Thereupon he threw it away on the various farm-servants and gardeners.

But two days later, as the Squire and his wife were entertaining a large circle of guests who had dropped in to tea, the footman appeared with a very portentous face and announced that a gentleman was anxious to see his master.

"Gentleman? Who? Oh, not now," said the Squire.

"Yes, I think my dear little Anna is better, but the poor child wants strengthening. If only we could get her to drink boiled milk——"

"Why don't you try sterilised? My sister-in-law's little girl—oh, no; now I remember, it was my cousin George's dead wife's grandfather——"

"He says it's very important, sir," ventured the footman.

With a half-impatient shrug the Squire went into the entrance-hall.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, for Mr. Larkin stood there.

No wonder his auspicious mien had impressed even the footman.

"I am truly delighted to be able to inform you, sir," he cried in triumphant tones, "that the—the cow presents absolutely no symptoms of tubercular infection. She may be declared sound!" He relished this statement so much that he repeated it. "Declared sound."

The Squire, who had been far more worried than he dared admit to himself about the past drinkings, if not about the future, ran back and threw open the drawing-room door. "Adelaide," he cried, "the cow is sound!"

"Oh, I am so thankful! So grateful! Yes, as I was saying, the Pasteurised milk loses all its best qualities (so the papers have been telling us), and boiling——"

"*I* boil," said the clergyman's wife.

"But now, you see, the cow is sound. And the vet——"

"This is Mr.—Dr. Larkin—ahem!" said the Squire. The doctor stood bowing in the doorway. All looked at him with much interest; they were quite a numerous party, and all, of course, gone on hygiene—the attempt to keep their rather useless bodies a little longer than otherwise undead.

"We are *so* grateful to you, Dr. Larkin!" cried the unbalanced Adelaide. "I feel that you have saved my daughter's life!" There was a thrill. The vet. blushed, had a cup of tea, agreed that the weather was hot for the time of year, and departed. In the hall he said to the Squire (while they were hunting for his hat, which he

had left in the drawing-room): "It would be advisable to renew this investigation every three months."

"No, no; for the present we shall specially reserve this one cow."

"That's what I mean—examine this cow. She is perfectly healthy now, but of course she may become infected to-morrow."

"She may?" The Squire stood aghast. "Why, then, if you wanted to make sure, you ought to examine her milk every day, and not drink the milk on the day of the examination."

"Well—yes," said the vet.

"And that seems to you reasonable?" asked the Squire discreetly.

"Perfectly reasonable. But we can be contented with approximative certainty."

"My wife won't be."

"The risk of infection is small up here." Somebody had brought his hat. He stopped on the steps. "Of course, the person who milks her must be perfectly healthy—that goes without saying. Else——"

"Else what?"

"I could not be responsible for the consequences."

"Is it certain that the infection passes from a man to a beast——"

"Koch says not, but Klausen says yes."

"Hang Klausen! William's healthy enough. Oh—Good Heavens!—he had a very bad cold last winter."

"Did he cough?"

"Yes, he coughed a lot. His old mother fancied he was going off in a decline."

"You had better send for Dr. Tott at once," said Larkin, getting on to his bicycle.

The Squire ran after him down the drive.

"Couldn't you—inoculate—William?" he gasped.

The vet. hung on his bicycle. "No good with human beings," he cried.

"But William is such a great calf!" almost sobbed the Squire.

The vet. felt that in matters scientific such levity approached nearly to drivell.

The Squire went back to his wife and abused science, but she pointed out to him how easy it is to condemn what you don't understand. One lady was busy praising a new condensed milk for infants. "But the nourishment is insufficient, I understand," she said, "after their fourth year."

"I always boil mine," said the clergyman's wife.

On this evening, of all evenings, little Anna elected to be fretful and to demand the raw milk which had been surreptitiously supplied to her, before all this rumpus began, by her reprehensible maid. "I daren't now!" cried the distracted Carolina. Next morning a messenger was sent post-haste for Dr. Tott, who affectedly grumbled, *sotto voce*, up to the library door and entered with a perfunctory smile. The Squire and his wife were there together, solicitude

written in every wrinkle of their brows. "Oh, doctor!" cried the lady. At that cry of faith and need Tott relented. He beamed on the pair.

"Little Anna won't touch her boiled milk!" sobbed the mother.

"But I hear that Sweet William is all right!" cried Dr. Tott.

"It isn't Sweet William now: it's William," interposed the Squire hastily. "You must find out at once, please, that William hasn't got what's-his-names, or he'll be giving them to the cow."

"Hasn't got what's-his——"

"Yes. Auscultate him, doctor—that's the word, isn't it? Let's go and find him at once——" The Squire ran for his cap.

"I can auscultate him as much as you like," said the doctor coldly, "but that won't enable me to certify him free from tuberculosis."

The Squire stopped in the doorway. His face went quite red. "Then what, in the name of all that's reasonable, *will*?"

"Nothing will. Science hasn't got as far as that yet. We shall in time. Meanwhile, Koch's tuberculin——"

"Enables you to say that a cow's milk is harmless on the day when you mayn't drink it!" burst out the Squire.

The doctor took no notice. "I advise you to choose a man who hasn't had a chest attack. William was certainly bad last winter. He seems all right now."

"Of course he's all right. What am I to say to him?"

"Oh, Horace, best make sure," put in little Anna's mamma.

"You can say that he's not"—a happy thought struck the doctor—"not clean enough!"

"Oh, I say, I can't do that! A smarter farm-hand never stepped."

The Squire walked out at the window; the doctor, at the lady's appeal, followed after him. "I can't be such a brute as that," said the Squire, with rueful countenance, striding away towards the paddock. He waited for the doctor to catch him up.

"If we get a man who's never coughed, we shall be all right?" he asked.

"As far as human certainty goes, yes," said the doctor.

"I thought scientific certainty was certain," replied the Squire crossly. "Well, I've thought out what I can do about William, and I dare say I'll find my man. There William goes—hi, William! how's the cow?"

"Doing beautiful, sir. She's given a pailful of cream this morning."

"You're hyperbolical, William; but that's neither here nor there. I wanted to tell you that I've been planning for some time to give you the under-keeper's place and the cottage, now that old John's dead."

"It's very good of you, sir, very good indeed."

"Well, what more?" The Squire always,

in his good temper, investigated his servants' feelings too far.

"I was only thinking, sir, I should be a bit lonely at first. My mother couldn't leave the others, and I shouldn't think, of course, of taking away Carolina from Miss Anna."

"No, you mustn't do that," said the crestfallen Squire. The doctor had hung back; he now came hurrying up—they were close to the paddock.

"Why!" he spluttered. "Why! Why! There's another cow in there with—how's that?"

"Yes, sir; you see, sir, she was lonesome after all the fuss there's been about her," said William, smiling. "She was lowing so, I put another in with her last night, when it was all over, to keep her company."

"To keep her company!" shouted the doctor. "To infect her." He turned to the Squire. "You can begin the whole thing over again," he said.

"Oh, d——n!" said the Squire. He said the whole three syllables out loud, and he wasn't sorry afterwards, in William's presence.

Without exchanging another word, the two gentlemen retraced their steps. The doctor thought the Squire was a very ill-tempered man. Really almost his best quality was his invalid wife. That lady stood waving a paper from the terrace before the house.

"A letter from Mary," she cried. "She was talking to me yesterday of a wonderful condensed milk in jars. It appears that it does wonders."

"Deleterious," said the doctor. He was a kind-hearted creature, but he would gladly have devised mediæval punishments for these amateur proposers of remedies. With a leap he reasserted his medical position.

"If you really abandon the idea of raw milk," he said, "and you know that I never advocated it, then there is a new German method of debacteriolising, which leaves the taste."

"And the strength?" queried the Squire.

The doctor glanced at his patient's yellow face.

"And the strength," he said.

"Then why didn't you tell us before?"

"Because dear little Anna insisted on having her milk raw. And, besides, this is quite a new thing; I only read of it last week."

"Heaven be thanked!" said the Squire.

"If only the child's nurse is reasonable about it," remarked Dr. Tott.

"We must see about that," said the Squire.

"Far be it from me to interfere in any way," persisted the tormented Tott, "but has it not occurred to you, madam, that the nurse's authority over our little Anna is almost too—too preponderating? The dear child sees with the maid's ears—eyes, I mean—and tastes, so to speak, with her tongue. Is there no danger that a mother's sweet guiding influence may be—I would not say, undermined?"

Anna's delicate mother sat up with astonishing rapidity.

"You are quite right, doctor," she said. "The same thought has occurred to me. Carolina had better go. What a man of discrimination you are!"

The Squire, ere the last sentence had been spoken, was already out of the room hunting up Carolina. He called her away from little Anna's box of bricks.

"Carolina, you like to drink your milk raw," he said.

She eyed him out of the corners of her eyes. She had heard of Sweet William's good health.

"Oh, the little *I* takes, sir!" she said; "but it's Miss Anna——"

"Yes, yes, I know. Now, look here! There's a new milk coming. If Miss Anna likes that—you understand me—I'll give William old John's cottage and his place. *If* she likes it; you understand?"

"I understand, sir," said Carolina, her eyes on the floor.

"And, if she likes it *awfully*, there may be some bits of sticks—odds and ends that we don't want—to help furnish that cottage, Carolina."

"Oh, sir!" said Carolina.

But the Squire had taken himself off. Best leave his words to sink in.

"Poof!" he said, and again sought the fresh air.

"How about Sweet William, sir?" said Sweet William's namesake, softly, at his elbow.

"Take her away!" cried the Squire. "I

never want to hear her name again! Carry her off! Make whatever you can of her! Dispose of her, William!"

"My beauty," said William, with his lips to the cow's ear, "I'll dispose of you. Your milk won't give me the tubers, nor Carolina, nor the kids that'll turn up in the cottage some day."

PRAYER

THE preacher's voice sank drowsily upon the drowsing heads below. In the little white-washed chapel, with its closed windows and closed doors and enclosed multitude of smells, the atmosphere was one of physical and mental suffocation. Outside, the August sun shone bright, and green branches lay fresh against the dusty windows. The minister's chickens grubbed and clucked against the walls.

In the minister's pew, where all eyes could behold them and criticise, sat his children, beside their mother, in a row. There were seven of them : the smallest, Peterkin, aged three, tight against her, the others, in a yellow-headed ladder, leading up to the stepbrother, the big boy, Jan Somers, aged eleven.

For the minister's wife had been a widow with one child when she had married him, a woman of some means and some culture, altogether above the status, social and mental, of the minister.

She had loved her first husband, Captain Somers, but she had deeply regretted, too late, his want of religion. She herself had been suddenly converted at an open-air meeting and

she was sorrowfully vexed with her husband for not sharing her experiences. When he died by a fall from his horse in the plenitude of his health she was stricken down to the dust. Rotteval, the Methodist minister, administered much consolation, and in the course of doing so married her. With the curious inconsistency of her co-religionists she accepted her first husband's incontrovertible damnation as an inevitable fact and tranquilly left him to the mercy of God, while proclaiming, as a tenet of her creed, that God's mercies were confined to the living.

Within five years she bore Rotteval six children, and the means which had amply sufficed for herself and her little Jan appeared inadequate to keep filled with any comfort half-a-dozen gaping mouths and a Methodist chapel. The new husband proved exacting. His standard was himself.

The boy Jan, occasionally drawn forth to his father's people from the increasing discomfort of his own home, returned thither, disconcerted, out of joint. His grandfather, his uncles, all heartily abused the hypocrite Rotteval, while conscientiously hushing each other with nods in the direction of the child. Before Jan Somers was ten he had grasped the situation as it presented itself to his dead father's relatives; he placed the Somerses much higher and the Rottevals much lower than was consistent with an unknown reality, and himself with his mother hung wretchedly between.

Instead of reproaching his mother he clung to her, as so-placed children will, with all his heart and soul. And he loved all his little step-brothers and sister devotedly, reserving his indignant contempt for the man who had given him them.

"The unending damnation of the damned," droned the minister, without a tinge of feeling in his voice. Jan knew the familiar rise and fall of the words which left his heart untouched. At grandfather's they told you that death was death; there was nothing beyond. You dropped like a fly, or went out like a lucifer match. You knew nothing of these things. Death was profoundly uninteresting. He followed with impatient eyes a buzzing bluebottle against the whitewash, longing to catch it and hold it tickling in his fist and let it go.

The minister's was a Dutch sermon : he droned for nearly an hour and a half. There are no clocks in such chapels, for a very good reason, but no clock could have induced him to be shorter.

Half-way he said "Damned" with an extra emphasis of pause and contemplation. His eyes wandered round the little assembly ; everybody woke up, and two collections took place to the tinkle of little bells at the end of black bags, while a psalm tune meandered through the building at the rate of three words to ten seconds. Jan had measured the pace one day, by the aid of the silver watch his grandfather had given him, and been whipped on the Monday morning

for looking at the time during church. Yet what did he care about the time? He knew they were half-way when he had put his two cents into the double collection: and the hour would elapse before he could escape into the open. Nor indeed was there any real escape, on the Sunday, from the two services and Sunday school and the talk in between.

It is not true, as some people have stated, that Rotteval intentionally ill-treated his stepson. Still less can it be maintained that the man was a hypocrite. His religion was, of its kind, sincere. It was of his own making and he proportionately believed in it. Its principal conviction, unconsciously suffusing every action or conclusion, was that human nature had by sin become so hopelessly corrupt that Simon Rotteval, being human, was infallible. Moreover, every man, woman or child was hopelessly damned, unless elect, and must therefore be saved. Personally, he, Simon Rotteval, was elect, and his wife, and his half-dozen children. The future state of the naughty, hardening stepson could not be so certain. It followed that, while all young hearts should be whipped into goodness, the stepson, in his own interest, being oftenest naughty, must, for love of the child himself, be most frequently, regretfully chastised.

Therefore there was much correction in the house of Rotteval, and the mother, when her fond instincts objected, was always effectually silenced by texts from the Book of Proverbs.

She surrendered unconditionally to the Book of Proverbs. She could stand up against Rotteval when his ideas clashed too much with her gentler upbringing, but not against Rotteval backed by Holy Writ.

So little Jan was solemnly spanked, caned and flogged, with the progress of his ages, into goodness not only, but into active piety. Never slapped or cuffed, for that, in the executant, might be dictated by, or at any rate ascribed to, temper, while a solemn ceremonial, preferably postponed till the day after, with much deploring of evil and depreciation of boy nature, and glorification of the Rod, could never be otherwise explained than by that passionate love of amelioration which enables a heavy-hearted (and handed) preceptor to endure the sufferings he bestows upon another. "I could not feel it more, were he one of my own," said the stepfather to the mother. She believed him.

To say that Jan's heart was thus forcibly inclined not only to obedience, but to active piety, is no exaggeration. For Rotteval was of those who believe that the terrors of religion alone appeal to the natural man. He beat the Bible into his children, filling them with minatory and condemnatory passages which he painfully underlined.

On the Sunday morning in August, to the drowsy congregation, his discourse was of prayer. He repeated the usual commonplaces about that greatest of living mysteries, the meeting of the

human will with the divine, and, being compelled to preach for an hour and a half, he repeated them over and over again. Jan was not listening. He was not an imaginative boy, healthy, happy-go-lucky, full of play, but he had felt long ago, in his sound little heart, that his stepfather was mistaken on the whole about God, and that in no case would it be possible for him, Jan Somers, to love both.

"I am sure God is a gentleman," the little boy had once said to one of his uncles, "and 'papa' is not."

The uncle had laughed, a foolish habit in intercourse with children.

"There isn't any God," he had answered, "but, of course, if there were, you would be right."

Jan Somers did not believe his uncle—any more than he believed Mr. Rotteval. For, doubting of his own clear-spoken conscience, he had applied to his mother, and she, drawing him to her bosom, had murmured eagerly of our Father which is in Heaven.

"Don't tell papa," she had said as she loosened her hold, "for he wouldn't understand."

The tears which had gathered in Jan's eyes dried to salt.

"Ask whatsoever you will," said the preacher for the twentieth time, "and if your will be in unison with the Lord's, He will grant your request."

Little Jan had heard only the text, and the text, ringing like a refrain throughout the sermon

—he would have to say it, without a hitch, before dinner—had easily got itself stuck in his head :—

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”

He was not yet twelve. After his twelfth birthday he would have to repeat as much as he could remember of the sermon. He used to think sometimes with vague terror of the Sundays when he would be more than twelve. Meanwhile, on this particular Sabbath morning he comforted himself with the very utterances of Scripture, not heeding a syllable of his stepfather's jargon all around them. The promise opened up to him a source of power, hitherto unsuspected, of boundless possibilities. A little boy was omnipotent. Whatever he asked the Almighty to do the Almighty was bound, by His own pledge, to perform it.

“If I ask God to make me win Everard Overveld's blood-alley, He must do it,” he thought. For, like all children nurtured upon dogma, he was ever ready to be misled by a new aspect of a text. He nodded stealthily to little Peterkin, at the other end, close to mother. “If I get the blood-alley, I'll ask Him to make Peterkin strong,” he reflected. For Peterkin was a delicate creature. But Peterkin tried hard to stare straight ahead. Jan, whom all the stepchildren adored, was constantly getting scolded for misbehaviour in church.

At last the long service was over ; the children walked home. Jan had been looking forward to

the fresh air and the sunshine. Once out in them, he felt disappointed. The air was still stifling; the light made him giddy in a way it had never done before. The fields swam before his eyes, and a hot something pricked and throbbed in his throat.

When all were already gathered around the table the father came hurrying in. He was a tall, fat man with the regulation rusty clothes and oily skin and solemn manner. He cast a comprehensive glance over the dinner, in the act of sitting down, with a sigh. Then his eyelids sank slowly and his important voice orated a grace.

"I was detained," he began, with his spoon in the soup, "by the Widow Koppers, who was again sorely troubled about her soul."

"I wish she wouldn't be troubled at meal-times," objected Mevrouw Rottenval.

The minister reproachfully shook his head. "It was the sermon," he said. "The blessed result of my unworthy discourse——" He suddenly checked himself, spoon in mid-air. "By-the-by, Jan, you have not yet repeated your text!"

Jan, who was swallowing slow mouthfuls with a difficulty he had never experienced before, cleared his throat, and prepared himself for utterance. To his horror he realised that the carefully noted verse would not come at command. It was gone from him altogether. There was only a singing in his head.

All the children waited. A drop of soup fell, with a splash, from the stepfather's spoon.

"I—I don't remember," said Jan. "It was about prayer."

The minister carefully deposited the spoon in his plate. "Don't remember!" he echoed.

"Oh, Jan, you must remember," pleaded the mother; "it was such a little text."

"It was prayer—about prayer," stammered Jan."

"Ask whatsoever——" prompted his mother, but the minister intervened with unctuous hand.

"My dear," he declaimed, "you must pardon me. The boy has nearly attained to those years of discretion which, amongst the Chosen People, were considered to admit of initiation into the mysteries of the Law, yet he can sit under the ministration of his father for two blessed hours and not condescend to pick up a single crumb from the Table!" Then he turned to his stepson. "Go upstairs to your bedroom," he said. "If you thus despise spiritual food, it is not meet that you should enjoy carnal! Go upstairs to your room, Jan, and copy out the text you have forgotten, or rather not learned, twenty times. . . . Matthew twenty-one, twenty-two!" he called after the small retreating figure.

"It is very wrong of him," said the mother, in answer to her husband's half-questioning, half-reproachful glance. "I cannot understand why the dear child shows such frequent indifference to religion. I sometimes fear it is my fault,

Simon, because, you see, he was born of parents who did not know the Lord."

"He certainly had not the inestimable advantage of these babes," assented Simon. "His father was a man of sin. Ours is a great responsibility, Matilda; we must never ignore it—lest the child grow up like his father!"

Matilda sighed, a very mingled sigh, full of sinful, sweet memories and present-day solemnities, a sigh of contentment withal.

Meanwhile the boy, settling to his task, gave a similar little sob, but his sounded like one of relief. He seemed glad to have got away from the noise and the sunlight downstairs. The bedroom was comparatively cool. For the first time in his life he felt ill, and he did not understand the feeling.

"Believing ye shall receive," he wrote, his inked fingers clinging tight around the pen. His head drooped down low upon his hand. "Ask whatsoever ye will——"

He looked up, to the blue sky beyond the window, the Northern Summer sky, placid and benign. The words were slowly eating themselves into his heart. The morning's thoughts in chapel came back to him. And he nodded to high heaven with full understanding of his strength. Then again he dropped his face toward the paper. "And all things whatsoever——" It seemed to him as if, suddenly, he held Aladdin's Lamp.

His castles in the air were upset by the

entrance of his stepfather. Simon Rotteval took up the partially filled sheet and carefully examined it.

"You have written very untidily," he said, "but I will excuse you the rest, because it is the Sabbath, and, besides, we must soon get ready for Sunday school. Say your text, Jan."

The boy said it, fluently enough this time.

"And now, Jan, we will kneel down together, and, using this great privilege accorded us, will pray that you may grow up a God-fearing man, not an unbeliever, like your relations."

In a flash the boy felt that the final word, intentionally vague, was aimed straight at his dead father.

"I won't," he said.

The minister swelled out in all his long rotundity, egg-shaped.

"Child!" he exclaimed.

Little Jan faced him, dizzy and determined.

"Kneel down here!" cried the minister, projecting a shiny forefinger, "and pray at once to be good."

The boy did not stir.

Simon Rotteval stood waiting for a long, solemn moment: then he proceeded majestically toward the door which communicated with his own chamber, and Jan's heart sank into his boots. But it came up again with a thump against his teeth and set them hard.

The minister returned with a well-known cane. He paused by the door.

"In consideration of its being the Sabbath day I will give you another chance," he said.

But Jan, with the thought of his dead father coming uppermost, remained silent, so he was first exhorted, then stripped and severely beaten, to the glory of God.

The children downstairs listened awestruck, looking at their mother. "Jan is naughty," said the mother. She felt very sad about her little son.

"You will remain here," cried the incensed pastor, as he flung the boy from him, "until you consent to ask forgiveness of your Creator! You are not fit to partake of our Sunday-school devotions! To think that any child of mine should deliberately refuse to pray!" Then he hurried out of the room, as if not trusting himself to remain, and locked the door behind him.

The boy lay for a long time as he had fallen, shaken by sobs. When at last he arose, grown calmer, there was that look on his face of set hatred which only ill-treatment can call up. He went to the window and stood gazing out. The summer afternoon was very still.

Suddenly he said aloud: "If I *ever* pray again, it will be that papa may die!" And presently he added: "I swear it."

Then again he was silent, thinking long, thinking what it would mean to him, to his mother, to all of them, this deliverance from the torment of oppression, as it appeared to him, the free return to grandpa, the uncles, the easy-going,

educated Somers family. His mother's feelings, entirely moulded by her religious sympathy with her husband, he could not, for lack of such sympathy, understand. According to his father's people she had made a monstrous mistake. And he loved her in spite of it, longing for her release from the degradation it had brought upon her.

The slow hours dragged on, as he stood or lay, thinking in a circle of angry triumphant thought. Whether he stood by the window or hung across the bed, the white paper on the table seemed to call to him. "All things whatsoever—all things——" And he felt that he held his step-father's life in the hollow of his little hand.

His head rolled on the pillow; the words went whirling round and round. As the shadows began to lengthen, the dull stabbing and swelling in his throat which had troubled him all day increased rapidly till he could hardly endure them. He sat up and gasped; the room seemed to heave toward him.

The door opened softly, and his mother came in.

"Jan, I hope you are no longer naughty," she said.

He did not answer, as much because of the physical effort it would have cost him as for want of a right word to say.

"You grieve your papa very much," his mother continued, and came and stood by the bed.

As she did so, he turned his hot face toward her, and she started. "Are you ill?" she said.

"I—I don't know," he gasped, and at the sound of his voice she swayed back.

"Does your throat hurt?"

"Yes."

"Come to the window. Let me look at it!"

He staggered off the bed. "It—it isn't very sore," he said.

"Are you sore anywhere else?" she asked, laying down, with trembling hand, the spoon she had pressed upon his tongue.

He looked at her, and she crimsoned. "I mean, do you feel pains in your limbs?"

"Yes, in my legs, mother. I did all the morning."

"Oh, Jan, why didn't you tell me? A few hours may make all the difference."

"What would it have mattered? I should have had to go to church all the same."—He tumbled back to his bed.

"Get into it at once," she urged, and fled from his unconscious reproach. She knew, without the hastily summoned doctor's telling, that the child had caught diphtheria.

All the others must be hurried out of the house, divided among willing members of the little congregation. A placard, according to the foolish law of the country, must be affixed to the front door, warning all men not to enter, although the inmates continued at liberty to go wherever they listed. Ninety-nine exasperating

medical measures had to be taken against infection, all utterly fallacious because of the impracticability of a hundredth. In the silence and bustle of nursing, the constantly renewed requirements of dangerous illness, the mother and the stepfather wore themselves out. The house was hushed around the struggle, yet alive with the terror of an impending catastrophe. After a day or two an operation became necessary. The doctor shook his head.

When he came back in the evening he shook it again. He was with the parents in the room adjoining the sick-room.

"If the boy is in danger, he must know it," said Rotteval. The mother looked across at the rugged old doctor, all her agony of hope in her face.

"Of course he is in danger," replied the doctor. "If you tell him, you will probably kill him at once."

"I am responsible," said Simon, "for my stepson's soul."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "And for his body, I presume," said the doctor, walking out.

"Don't, Simon!" said the wife softly. "Let me." They were both pale with anxiety and night-watching. The fat man's clothes flapped about him. "The child's soul——" persisted Simon.

"I will be its keeper. Simon, I have never wanted my own way: I have let you act for the best with the boy——"

"Do not reproach me with that now!" cried the stepfather. "If you had desired differently——"

"Did not I say it was for the best? I reproach no one, not even myself. We have done our duty by the child according to our lights. God knows the rest. Grant me now this one thing: let me——" Her voice faltered. She faced him. "Do you think it is an enviable thing to tell a child he is going to die?"

"Come, come, it is not as bad as that!" objected Simon, advancing to place a limp hand upon her shoulder; but she shook him off and burst into an agony of tears.

"It will be to-morrow," she sobbed.

And, indeed, she had too well understood the doctor's reticence. Through the night she watched the unequal battle; in the early grey morning she said to herself: "It is nearly over."

She knelt by the bedside. Perfect silence lay all about her, in the house, and around it. Her husband was asleep in the adjoining room. Not a leaf stirred, not a living creature outside. Only the short, quick gasps of the boy kept on, and on, and on, stabbing her to the heart, every one. It was three o'clock, the majestic dawn of a cloudless summer day.

"Jan!" she whispered, close to the dying child's ear, "you are very ill, dear. You must pray to God; you must pray."

He faintly shook his head. To her unspeakable horror, in distinct refusal, he shook his

head. It was to her, in the honesty of her religious fervour, as if all the grief and anxiety she had undergone were as nothing compared to this moment of agony. She clasped her hands till the nails entered the flesh without her observing it. Was it possible that the misunderstanding between the child and his stepfather had brought her boy's heart to this?

In a tumult of intercession she bent over him, regardless of the danger, and, amid the cries of her soul to God—

"Jan!" she said, "Jan! You are ill. God only knows how ill you are. You must pray to Him! You must pray!"

The boy forced himself to a supreme effort. "*I mayn't*," he hissed.

For that had been, throughout all the fever and the torment, amid the hideous confusions of his fancy, that had been the continuous oppression, worse even at times than the iron tightening at his throat. "O God, I mayn't. You know I mayn't!" He had repeated it over and over again, in restless tossings and whisperings, during the long day, the longer night. He was bound by his childish oath to pray first for his stepfather's death before he could put up any other petition.

"Whatsoever ye shall ask!" It seemed written in the air all around him: the flowers on the wall-paper wreathed the words in unending chains. He could ask his life of God; the pain would stop; he would get up and run about

again. But his mother would be a widow, his little stepbrothers orphans.

"O God, have mercy upon me. You see I mayn't. I can't, God; You know I mayn't. Oh, help me, though I mayn't pray. My throat hurts so!"

Of the Deity of his stepfather's preaching he understood little, yet he knew Him to be terrible, righteous, an avenger. He knew every word of the Bible to be literally true: it must be accepted exactly as it stood.

"I mayn't," he gasped, turning to his mother his desperate, appealing eyes.

She lost all control of herself, sinking down by the bed. "You may!" she shrieked. "You may! You may! It's a lie of the devil's. O God, pity him! Pity me! Tell him it's a lie! Have mercy on him. Help him to pray!"

But he knew that she couldn't understand. He was unable to explain to her. He could only lie gasping away his life.

"Oh, pray to Him!" she sobbed, "pray! pray! Shake your head, dear, to show you understand!"

He lay staring at her, not moving, anxious to spare her the pain of a refusal, pretending not to hear.

Then, suddenly, there came to him a great understanding that he was doing right, and that God, far beyond all men, knows right from wrong. God, as he had once cried out, in the clumsy muddle of the religious contortions

around him, was a gentleman, and he met Him, in his death-agony, as a gentleman should.

"I have done right," he said, deep down in his young soul. "Have mercy on me, God!"—and in the swift calm of that overspreading consciousness he died.

Simon Rotteval, stealing in many minutes later, found the mother, lost in prayer, by the bed.

"You must not pray for him any longer now," he said; "that would be wrong."

She opened her eyes and gazed at her husband.

"I know," she answered; "I am praying for myself. And for you."

"You consider me to blame?"

"No, Simon; of course our religion is right. But I can only say, God, have mercy! God, have mercy!"

"The Lord knoweth His own," said Simon Rotteval.

THE LIBRARY

IT was the young Countess who started the village library—that village library. She had been staying, with her mother, at the great English philanthropist's great place in Scotland, and that gentleman's—I beg his pardon, that nobleman's—daughters had shown her their library, and all the Jocks and Jeans, in a motley medley, on a Thursday evening, by the electric light (from the castle) in the village "tea" room, having out Scott and the Schönberg-Cotta family, and the whole of the "Pansy" series from the hands of the Lady Grizel and the Lady Meg. It had been quite an effective scene, and it had impressed itself deeply on the young Countess's well-intentioned mind. The bonnie brow faces (I am not sure that "brow" is right, but I believe so), the soft, sweet-smelling summer evening outside, the heat and blaze indoors, and the eager hands outstretched, as their turn came, for instruction, and the young ladies in their white frocks and jewels, helpful, interested, giving advice. And a great, big lubber of a farm-hand, who had said, in his clownish manner (so "taking"), when they offered him "Waverley": "Na, nae" (or is it "nae, na?"), *that* Scott—

it was the "ither" one he had meant, the brown volume "yon," the "History of the Westminster Conference"; he had heard there was a powerful lot of instruction in that. His auld grandmither, he said, had told him Walter Scott was "warldly": there was a micht of love-making and profane swearing in Sir Walter. The Lady Grizel said that was true, up to a point. She offered him the second volume of the Schönberg-Cotta family, the first happening to be out at the time.

The young Countess came home to Holland, thoughtful and rather happy. She was so tired of her one act of kindness to others, which was scratching her parrot's head. Once upon a time she had undertaken—at the great philanthropist's instigation—helping "Silly," the idiot boy, to live his life. But he had left off living it altogether, just as she was beginning to make headway. She had spoken of it, sadly, with the good English earl (Lord D—), and he had agreed with her that such dispensations—the having to dispense with "Silly"—were very painful. Lady Meg had given her some charming ideas for muslin morning gowns, and the address of the best manicure woman in London: she went back rather happy and very thoughtful. She had thoroughly enjoyed her stay.

Her own home doesn't stand among hills and heather; its surroundings are stunted pines and great wastes of dune-land, away towards the sand-girt sea. It is rather a desolate region. There are not muslin frocks enough in the

neighbourhood. But you can be very useful. And in the winter you get away to the Hague.

You can be very useful. That was her haunting sorrow, and had been for years—she was now twenty-seven—the feeling that you ought to be, and could be. She came back home, from all that usefulness and splendour in Inverness-shire, thinking it out gently to herself in the train: the latest novel they had given her to read on the journey—one of Mrs. Humphry Ward's—slipped from her pensive fingers to the floor. The bump woke her mother, much tried by the emotional night-crossing and clumsily dozing.

"What's that?" cried the old Countess. "My dear, how you startled me!" The Countess Hilda realised that her usefulness was again not all that it might have been.

She found her father, as usual, full of complaints about the poor people. He said they were so shockingly ignorant. But he had always said that. Except when he said they knew too much.

"But how can they be ignorant and know too much?" Hilda had once timidly questioned, many years ago.

He stared at her, with his fine, hard, old countenance, the bent nose, the parchment cheeks, the grey frill.

"My dear," he said, "if you were not absolutely unacquainted with everything concerning the peasantry, you could not possibly inquire."

That was all the reply she got. One must admit that it was damping.

"They don't know the right things," her British friend had explained to her. "You are ruined in your country by Board schools, secular education, absurd development of what nobody needs—in one word, the Tyranny of the Teacher. You are fifty years ahead of us in this craze, and you are suffering from all the mental diseases that we shall get to in time, if we don't look out. You follow me?"

"I wish I could," replied Hilda, who misunderstood this English phrase.

He was very patient, and wise and good—he did well, and meant even better—he told her all about it over again.

"But most of my father's labourers can't even write," she said.

"They can read, however."

"Oh, yes; they can all read."

"That's bad enough. I mean to say: what an opportunity for evil! Have you any idea, my dear young lady, what they read?"

"No. I don't think they read anything. The local paper, perhaps. But only the children that fall into boiling water."

"The children—that—I don't think I quite——"

"The local accidents-column. What we call the 'Sundries.' Even my maid, who is of course quite of the highest class, always tells me of the babies that have fallen into boiling water.

Nothing else seems really to interest her. And so many fall."

"Immediate measures should be taken to stop it," said the philanthropist, energetically. "A village *crèche*——"

"Yes," said Hilda sadly, "my mother arranged with an old woman once to take the smallest infants. But, when everything was ready, all the little cots and—and other household utensils, the mothers refused to send their children. It appears they didn't trust the old woman. They had an idea she might get the children mixed."

"They need a great deal of patience," said the philanthropist, with a sigh.

"It is true she was very blind," admitted Hilda, in a small voice.

"The difficulty might easily have been obviated," he pleaded, "by a simple device. In our great cities, where the danger is much more real, the thousands of infants in every *crèche*, have a number stamped on their cot, on their mother——"

Hilda cried out.

"Given to their mother, of course I mean," he said, with just a tinge of impatience on his angelic countenance; "on their night-gowns, their bibs and their bottles." He stopped to draw breath. "On every article they use, I believe," he added. "But the babies would probably not interest you. My unmarried daughters object to babies. They are all the better with the boys."

Hilda thought of "Silly," and a tear gathered in her eye.

"I'm afraid of boys ; they're so rough," she pleaded.

"You did very well with that poor idiot the one time you spoke to him——."

"It was only once, and he was an idiot," said Hilda.

"Well, my girls told me you were so much interested in their library. I feel sure Meg would be delighted to help you in any way she could."

"But they don't want to read, with us," she repeated piteously.

"They must be made to want, then," he answered sternly. "Your country people are evidently a very different sort from our Scottish peasantry, who all read Shakespeare, Carlyle, Emerson and Burns."

"Oh, indeed, indeed, they must be very different!" she said earnestly. "Now, my maid, when we were on the Riviera, she never could go to church, you know, and we felt she must have some religious instruction, and I took to reading her Mr. Spurgeon's sermons on Sundays. Do you know Mr. Spurgeon's sermons?"

He smiled. "Yes. They are very beautiful: don't you think so?"

"Yes, I think they are very beautiful," she answered shyly, "and also a little long. Elizabeth found them very long. Although I skipped. Do you think it was wicked to skip?"

"Not if you did it for her sake. It would have been, had you done it for your own."

"Oh!" she said gratefully, and hesitatingly, "but Elizabeth used to yawn dreadfully, and once she fell fast asleep, so I fear I didn't skip enough. Then I thought it would be better to read her the Bible only. I *couldn't* be wrong about that, and, if she fell asleep, it *must* be her fault: don't you think that was right?"

"Very right," he answered.

"So I read her the story of Esther—in parts. That always seems to me such a beautiful story, and Elizabeth listened with great interest; she really did."

"Aha!"

"Yes, but, some days afterwards, I asked her whether she didn't think Mordecai was a splendid character, and she said: Yes he was; but the character she liked best was the nice young clerk from the shop."

The noble earl waited, sympathetically.

"I found she had hopelessly mixed up the Bible narrative with some goody-goody modern story she was reading at the time."

"You should not say goody-goody stories, my dear. They are the foundation of our library, as they will be of yours."

So, in her odd mixture of satiric aspiration, the young Countess returned, resolved to work the library. She told her old-fashioned parent a great deal about Clochtghlorchler, and he said he was heartily glad he hadn't been there. But

he was a curmudgeon, and, like so many fathers, he might have made her life ten times pleasanter without any discomfort to himself.

"Pshaw!" he said. "The less they read, the better for them!"

"But that is because they don't read the right kind of things," replied Hilda.

He stared at her. And then he made a sound as if he were gargling. That was his way of saying Clochtghlorchler. You can't do it different, unless to the manner born. Then you say: Clooter.

She would have despaired of beginning her library at all, but a week or two after her return there arrived a big parcel, addressed to her from Scotland. She clapped her hands.

"Oh, the tartan they promised me!" she cried. "How delightful!"

But it was not the tartan this time: a pile of books rolled on to the carpet—publications they proved of the London "Society for the Rational Development of a Refined Imagination among the Respectable Poor." The Society's stamp was upon every copy, so that there might be no mistake about whom they were intended for.

"Father forgot to ask you," wrote Lady Meg (this rather peculiar appellation, by-the-by, was a "link with our humble kinswomen of the same clan"), "but he is sending these books, because he feels sure they will come in useful. You Dutch people are such wonderful linguists that,

no doubt, many of the better class villagers have a smattering of English. Father says he was surprised at the way all the tram-conductors spoke our language at Amsterdam. I suppose your people are bilateral like our own Highlanders, and of course, with our great empire, English does tend to become the universal language, doesn't it? What a responsibility!

"Your affectionate

MEG

"I'm afraid the tartan won't be ready for another three weeks. Do write and tell me *all* about your library. We are so *immensely* interested. When are you coming to Scotland again?"

So the library was started. It had a nucleus. When the old Count saw the nucleus in a little pile on the drawing-room floor, he said "Pshaw!" And he went off to his room without another word than that aggravating one, and returned presently holding a big volume under his arm. This he solemnly deposited on top of the nucleus. It turned out to be a book of Japanese poetry that somebody had forgotten in the library, somehow, many years ago.

"This is *my* contribution," said the old Count gravely.

Hilda laughed, then her face grew very solemn.

"Never mind," advised the comfortable Countess.

But the old lady did a little more than that. She answered an advertisement in the newspapers, and bought up a cheap remnant of standard authors—six dozen odd volumes, many appropriate—and she placed these in a splendid row before Hilda, when the girl came down to breakfast on the day after they had arrived.

“So the library is started, willy-nilly,” said Hilda, kissing her mother.

“Your responsibility altogether, my dear,” growled the Count.

“It will do Hilda a lot of good,” said Hilda’s mother. The Countess was the image of placid contentment. She enjoyed unbroken health, her position, and a good dinner. She thought you should be very kind to the poor.

The good work now being fairly under way, Hilda, with much nervousness and misgiving, asked for books, hunted up books, spent her limited pocket-money on books. As a matter of fact, she was originally the rich member of the family, an old aunt having left her a large sum, but this legacy had early become her misfortune, for her father, to secure the reversion to his son, had practically condemned her to a life of single blessedness. Meanwhile he allowed her a pittance out of the revenues. The scandalous law of the country which designedly destroys all hereditary possessions must be adduced to condone the old Count’s action, though it cannot altogether excuse it. It had caused Hilda to reflect frequently, when out of spirits, that everybody would be the better

for her death. At present she worked hard writing out numbers and sticking them inside the books and on the backs. It was decided that the library should be installed on shelves in a corner of the "Church-room," the House being more than a mile distant from the biggest and most central of the many scattered heaps of fishing-huts. But there was a great to-do before we got so far. Innovations usually go awry in Dutch villages, where everything proposed by the gentry is always systematically negatived on that account. The Lord of the Manor had no power over the "Church-room," though he — *i.e.* Hilda — had largely paid to build it. The churchwardens were all conservative to the core, as far as their own rights and wrong-doings were concerned, and radical to a man in their attitude towards the Count. Their leader, Churchwarden Spottle, convened a meeting. It was decided that the use of the room should be accorded the young Countess, on condition that no books should be introduced into the library which were "immoral, improper, indecent, or unorthodox."

"Ay, ay," said the half-dozen black-coated idiots, with their long pipes, round the deal table.

"We must now decide who is to decide," began Churchwarden Klotz, "which books are im——" and he said it all again.

"Ay, ay," said the others. It was agreed that the worthy president should examine the catalogue. He gravely consented to do this. A little difficulty presented itself later on, when it was

discovered that he could barely spell. Churchwarden Klotz, Spottle's life-long parochial rival, laughed aloud at this. "Ho! ho!"

"What are you shouting at?" demanded Spottle, his lean jaws gone grey.

"Nothing. Oh, nothing. Only what was that you read out just now from the Countess's draft of Rules?"

"The Prescription, on pain——"

"Ha! ha! It isn't 'prescription.' It's 'subscription,' man! The subscription, on pain of——"

Churchwarden Spottle snatched the paper back.

"Let me alone, Klotz," he said. "I'm President! She doesn't write: she just scratches like a hen on a muck-heap. Exposure——"

"Expulsion!" cried the exultant Klotz. "Brethren, I fear that our worthy Brother Spottle will hardly be able to form an accurate estimate——"

"Do you think you can do it?" interrupted the infuriated Spottle.

Little, meagre Brother Klotz dropped his eyelids.

"It is not for me to say," he murmured. "If the brethren consider me worthy, I shall certainly spare no pains."

After a long tussle his party carried the day. An elaborate epistle, full of mistakes, was despatched to the Lord of the Manor. The Brethren would be delighted to accede to his

Nobleness's request, but their grave Responsibility, etc., the Souls of the community, etc.—a few words more reverend still and “immoral, im—— etc., etc.”

“Thunder and lightning!” cried the purple old Count. “Do the outrageous fools think that my daughter——”

The mild, much harassed Minister offered to mediate. He was quite sure he would be able to explain——”

“Explanation be—blessed!” said the Count. Without consulting Hilda, who happened to be away for a day or two, he packed up all the books of the London Society for the R.D.R.I.R.P. in the case which had brought them, and sent them off to Churchwarden Klotz. He told Hilda nothing on her return, but quietly awaited further developments. After a week the books came back, with a missive to say that Brother Klotz had advised the other Brethren that the books intended for the library did not contain anything which could be considered im——, etc. Klotz, resolved that the library should succeed, now Spottle had taken a dislike to it, had kept his conscience immaculate by not opening the case at all. Hilda had not missed the English books, which she had of course at once consigned to a garret : her father did not tell her of the incident, and pocketed, with a little more bad language, the intentional affront, for he had suddenly made up his mind to encourage the library. His wife had convinced him, as usual. Anything to render

Hilda happy at home, to keep her from adventuring marriage, in spite of his restrictions and her twenty-seven years.

"I think everything is ready now," said Hilda. "The annual subscription is twopence. I can open next Thursday."

"Why Thursday?" asked the Count.

"It was Thursday," replied Hilda, "at ——" and she gargled.

"Well, I hope you'll have some of 'em come," said her father. Hilda looked much alarmed.

"Oh, some of them are bound to come," her mother reassured her. "Those that live round the Church."

"I hope some more will, mother. There were lots of them came to Lady Meg."

"Let us be hopeful," replied the Countess. "After all, why shouldn't they come? You've got books in that library I shouldn't mind reading myself."

This really sounded hopeful, for the Countess rarely read anything. She was one of those people who, doing little, always pathetically complain that they yearn to have more time for books.

Had Hilda known, she could have been at rest. Churchwarden Klotz—he cannot be called "Elder," for he had nothing to do with the spiritual needs of the congregation: he belonged to the board which looks after the church property—Churchwarden Klotz was zealously working on her behalf. He had stirred up his

various connections to depute their young people and their apprentices: they could hardly be expected to go themselves. And the Count—seized at the last moment by a dread of failure—sent his bailiff round to some of the villagers who, according to the pleasant peasant expression, were “utterly under him,” requesting their presence at the opening, whatever they might do after that.

Spottle, of course, said the library was the Abomination of Wickedness. He could do so, having voted against his rival's report. But he had said so many things were that (the A. of W.)—peep-shows, and motor-cars, and the present minister and the preceding one—you really couldn't attach the same significance to his utterance as when he had first made it regarding the Roman Catholic Church. After all, Spottle was not as omniscient as he thought himself. He was the only person, for instance, in the whole neighbourhood unaware that his son was sweet—unfathomably sweet—on Rina Klotz.

Churchwarden Klotz closed both eyes. And also, occasionally, alone with his meditations, he closed one. For it was delightful to realise you were fooling old Spottle, and Spottle was a much richer man than Klotz. But, eyes closed or not, he kept a tight hand upon his daughter. “Where are you slinking to?” he would call after her. “I don't believe you know. Sit down!”

The eventful day—or, rather, the eventful

night—arrived. "You see, most of our people work during the daytime," Lady Meg had explained. The Countess Hilda admitted that, except for fisher-folk and bakers, the same rule held true in Holland. After nightfall, then, was the best time to get the people together. The long winter evenings were approaching, when even the most indifferent might find occasion to read.

When the young Countess drove down from the House, she saw from afar off, in the dusk, a little crowd about the "Church-room" door. Her parents had been called away, rather unexpectedly, by a semi-official invitation. She felt painfully nervous: to keep her in countenance, she brought along a schoolboy cousin, who happened to be staying in the house, a young Hopeful who could probably not be equalled for love of mischief by the whole of Lady Grizel's Band of Hope.

"Why don't you go in, good people?"

"Full inside," said a surly voice. These villagers, from an innate humility, or self-knowledge, dislike being called "good."

Hilda's heart leaped, and sank. Indeed, the whole place—not a very large one—was crowded with curious faces, mostly beardless. She had prepared a little speech, about the pleasures of getting away from one's monotone existence and the advantages of contact with good and great minds. After the first flutter she rose to the occasion and spoke her few sentences admirably,

with a simple, shy appeal to them that conquered the whole lot—kindly enough and far from unintelligent in their awkward peasant way. They were not moved to enthusiasm, for nothing could have done that—not the last trump, and themselves booked for heaven!—they had never applauded in their lives, but they grunted, and some of the women nodded to each other, and Ludovic—the imp schoolboy—said: “Hear, hear!”

Then the books were exposed on their shelves, and the front rows of possible “Subscribers” stood staring stolidly at them. The room was very close: no electric light here, but a kerosene lamp which had been kept low till it smelt horribly, and had then been turned up and left smoking. The Freule Hilda got the lamp right. The stolid front rows stared. There was a little visible annoyance about the annual subscription of twopence, though carefully explained. Everybody suddenly felt that he was paying for his education, paying a high price too. And if you pay, you are master of the situation. The Freule turned into a purveyor, like the tape-and-buttons man. A good many of the front row slunk back, indignant. Twopence, indeed! Because she wanted to lend you books. Think what you can buy for twopence! Ten cigars. Or a power of baccy.

But, at this stage, Klotz came definitely to the Freule's help and saved the whole situation. He stepped forward, little but inflated.

"You may put me down for a full subscription," he said, in a carrying voice, "and my wife for ano——"

"I haven't no time to read," from the wife in a shrill falsetto—"what with the washing——"

"And my wife" (much louder) "for another, and my daughter Rina, that's qualifying for a schoolmistress, for a third!"

He stepped back and eyed everybody, including the young Countess, triumphantly. It had involved reckless expenditure, but he had beaten Spottle. After this, the village tradespeople, or tenants who were "utterly under," could not hold back. The young Countess put down names and addresses, and mixed up people she ought to have known by sight, hot, blushing and happy.

"And now," she said, smiling on the stiffening subscribers, "what book would you all like to have? You see, you can each have a book, but of course you can't all have the same."

This was a little pleasantry: not a feature relaxed. Young Ludovic stood by the shelves, a table, covered with a long green cloth, beside him. All the volumes had been covered in nice thick brown paper, to keep them clean: excepting in size they looked exactly alike. Young Ludovic had been very busy with them, sorting and rearranging and putting them down, under the green table, and lifting them up again, while his cousin was delivering her little address. He had got them all right now. He suggested that he

should read out names, and the one who wanted the particular book should call out "Me!" This was approved of. The young Countess, at her farther end of the table, to write down the names of the recipient and his book.

"Dickens. Dahvid Koperfielt!" called Ludovic—the translation, of course.

Nobody said "Me!" so he dumped the book down in the hands of the nearest subscriber—an abnormally fat old farm-wife.

Hilda had had some doubts about "David Copperfield," but Lady Meg had him, and "Oliver Twist," and even "Nickleby;" still, she was rather glad that he hadn't fallen to Klotz.

"'The Needs of my Baby!'"

Dead silence. Dump, to a yellow and red plough-boy. A faint "Ludovic!" from Hilda.

"All right! Go ahead! 'Commentary of the Colossians'?"

No response. Dump, to a fisher-lad of twelve. Then Hilda intervened.

"Oh, get away! Get away!" he cried excitedly. "Stick to your writing! I'll select 'em better! All right!"

The remaining books were more reasonably apportioned, and the meeting broke up. Hilda, delighted with her success, gave a full description of the proceedings to her parents. Ludovic helped in the description. He laughed a great deal. Next morning, at an early hour, he left for his own home.

A few hours after his departure the news,

which had already spread all over the neighbourhood, reached the Manor House. The young gentleman, whilst reading out Dutch titles, had promiscuously distributed Lord D——'s English present, having assiduously dragged it down from the garret, done it up in brown paper, and secreted it under the green tablecloth.

Every tuppenny subscriber sat in his farmhouse or fishing-hut with an English book—and many of them were a couple of miles away.

In the afternoon Churchwarden Klotz and Mrs. Klotz called to see the Count. It was the Count they wished to see—please. The Count.

"Yes, yes: I know," cried the Count, entering the room, rather flurried. "An unfortunate mistake, Klotz. We'll put it right next Thursday. Give everybody two books."

"It's not *that*!" replied Klotz, with much scorn, whilst his wife stood beside him and snorted.

"Then what the devil——"

"We've come to ask what this means!" burst out Klotz, and he held a book, open at the title-page, under the venerable nose of the Count.

That gentleman fumbled hastily for his glasses. "'John Halifax, Gentleman!' I tell you, next Thursday you can have——"

"My daughter can read English," said both husband and wife in unison, "and I want to know what she has done to merit this here insult, please!"

Klotz's dirty finger pointed — Mrs. Klotz's tried to point—to the imprint on the page: "Society for the Rational Development of a Refined Imagination among the Respectable Poor."

"The Respectable Poor!" said Churchwarden Klotz.

Mrs. Klotz said, "The Respectable Poor!"

"Oh, good Lord, my wife must help me out of this!" cried the Count.

He tried to bolt, but the Churchwarden barred the way.

"I wash my hands of the whole library!" said the little man, and flung down the books on a table and went out. His big wife stalked after him.

"I hear Klotz has thrown up the Countess's book-shop!" said Churchwarden Spottle to his son Herman. "Well, then, you can go next Thursday and pay your twopence for a book. You needn't read it—and mind your sisters don't; but Klotz shan't say he can make and break things in *this* village!" Spottle struck his fist on the table. "Get two books!" he said.

"It's a long distance," said the diplomatic son. And, indeed, it was nearly two miles, Klotz's cottage standing about half-way on the same lonely road across the dunes.

"They say Klotz has demanded back his sixpence," continued old Spottle, ignoring Herman's complaint. "Get four books! You can say it's for the farm-servants, but mind you don't let

them have them. A-keeping them from their work."

Rina's arguments, however, so far softened her father, that she, at least, was allowed to continue her subscription. Her face was the first Herman saw when he entered the schoolroom, but he forgot to mention this fact to his father on his return.

Hilda arrived, accompanied by her mother, and everything passed off well.

The Thursday after that it rained cats and dogs. It also snowed, and sleeted, and occasionally hailed and thundered a bit, but whatever else it did, it never left off raining. It was bitterly cold, but, even while it froze, it rained. "It" is the heaven of Holland, which can do all these things at once and never tire.

"It's no use, my dear child: you can't go," said the Countess, comfortable and comforting, under the lamplight, by the fire. "Your father had to take the carriage. Never mind: there won't be anybody there in such weather as this."

"Oh, but I must go!" said Hilda.

"Nonsense! Why, it's little under a mile! Just listen to the wind! And pitch dark!"

"I can take Elizabeth, and the stable-boy. You don't really mind, do you, mother? You see, it's my duty."

The Countess shrugged her shoulders. "Duties have changed wonderfully since I was young," she said. So Hilda, escorted by the openly grumbling Eliza and the tacitly grumbling

stable-boy, paddled and struggled in mackintosh and goloshes, all the cold, windy way to her library.

But she was rewarded. In the church-room stood a solitary figure, Rina Klotz. "Ah!" said Hilda, "the influence of education!" She blushed to think: if *she* had stayed away! Why, the girl had a great deal farther to walk than she, all alone, too, along that lonely road! How true had been the estimate of her English friends, at which father and mother, and even she, had smiled a little incredulously. What a thirst for instruction, unappeased, dwelt in these simple minds! Oh, how wrong, how wrong of the cultured classes to have ignored that craving through all these years!

"You like reading, I feel sure," said Hilda pleasantly.

"Oh, I love it more than anything!" replied the girl.

At that moment Herman Spottle came lounging in. A good-looking, unintellectual, rich farmer's son. Of the relation between him and Rina the Freule knew nothing: low peasants were beneath Elizabeth's notice; the stable-boy grinned.

Hilda's heart glowed. The representatives of the two rival factions. Henceforth the complete success of the undertaking was assured. Nobody else came. The weather was very bad.

"You like reading, too, I feel sure?" she said, beaming on Herman.

"Oh, yes, of course," replied the young man.

"I hope you enjoyed your book?" she turned to Rina.

"Yes, indeed I did. The hero is a beautiful character."

"And now you must choose a new one."

The girl hesitated. "Oh, please," she said, "while I make up my mind, let Mynheer Spottle choose first."

Herman Spottle looked at the tempting bookshelves, to which the young Countess bowed an invitation. He looked at the volume in Rina's hands. A wild longing seized upon him to touch the pages she had touched, to read the words her eyes had lingered over, to find out what sort of hero she thought a beautiful character.

"I think I'll just have hers," he said.

The book was transferred to his hands. He clutched it fondly.

"And now, you, Miss Klotz?" said Hilda.

Rina gazed at her lover. Only one reply was possible. She gave it.

"I think I'll just have his," she said.

With a faint look of surprise the young Countess acceded to this request also. That closed the proceedings. She trudged back to the Manor House, a little wondering but very contented withal. Her unwilling companions continuously, if inaudibly, cursed the library.

But the two lovers, struggling on together, their forbidden walk, up and down the long and lonely path—these blessed the library. The

wind howled and the rain smote among the sand-dunes. Herman's arm closed round Rina's waist and steadied her. The two books rested in his breast-pocket, as they had done on their outward road.

All this happened last winter. It is said that Herman and Rina are to be married early in the spring, in spite of old Spottle's grumbling. The library continues to develop as favourably as the soil in which it has been planted will allow. A new book was added the other day, entitled "The Greater Glory." It was bought with a scratch lot, second-hand, under the impression that it is a religious work. The Countess Hilda believes it means heaven. But although its discovery by the Board of Churchwardens would probably jeopardise the existence of the library, there is little risk of its ever being moved from the place where it reposes, between the aforementioned Commentary on the Colossians and the History of the Council of Dordt.

THE NOD

THE whole orchard was a glory of apple-blossom. A flush of pink and white, in great clouds of softness, between the blue sky and the green grass.

Two lovers, young and pleasant to look upon, moved slowly among the trees. The golden sunlight played all about them, through the branches and under their feet. A number of finches were at work in the coppice that bordered the apple-field. Their twitterings and flitterings seemed everywhere. One only had struck work—to sing. The world, in its million conscious throbbings, was full of the music of nesting and pairing and making love. The buds burst open to see.

"It's no use. It can't be," said the young man, despondingly. He was a tall young man, well grown, but pale and thin, with the serious countenance of a student who takes to heart the studies he has chosen for his own.

"Oh, Bart!" she said, for that was his name—Bartholomew.

"Your father won't let us marry, unless he can keep you here in this village. And how can

I stay in the village, unless they elect me as minister? And they'll never elect me as minister unless Elder Preek approves of my sermon. And how can I ever hope to preach a sermon of which Elder Preek will approve?"

He turned on her in melancholy triumph. He had never put the case so succinctly before.

"Yes, yes, I know," she replied sadly. "But—oh, Bart!—at least you might try."

"I have been trying—turning it over in my mind—for weeks and months, ever since the parish here fell vacant. Trying! Dear Heaven, how I have tried! All these days I have been working at to-morrow's sermon. All this morning I have been polishing it, twisting it, and picking out the faults. What's the good? It doesn't read a bit like Elder Preek!"

"Perhaps," she said faintly, "they won't mind so very much what he thinks."

"You know better, Katrine. The whole lot of them lie in the hollow of the Elder's horny palm. The religious life of five thousand souls is entirely dependent on the crabbed theology, the metaphysical freaks, of a tyrannous old pump-maker. The Apostle Paul himself wouldn't stand a chance against Elder Preek."

"Do you know," she said meditatively, "that's what I've been thinking."

"Of course he wouldn't. Try Preek with some properly amended text, and I'll wager he'll tell you it isn't true."

"I don't mean that exactly. I mean—Bart, I could never tell you what I mean."

"Why not?"

"Because it's so horribly wicked," she almost whispered: "I can't get it out of my head at nights, but it's horribly wicked, Bart."

"Can you think of wicked things, Katrine?"

"If you only knew!" she answered. "It's a way that *might* succeed, Bart—a horribly wicked way."

He laughed, and an apple-blossom fluttered to his feet.

"Supposing you took an old sermon," she whispered, her head against his shoulder, "a very, very old sermon, one of those by the seventeenth-century divines who preach that the chief delight of the saints will be watching the torments of the damned, and supposing you made your discourse out of that for tomorrow?" Her tones were not absolutely serious, in spite of herself—a medley of hope and despair.

"It would spoil in the making," he answered. "Katrine, if you don't look out, Elder Preek will be enjoying your torments some day." Then he caught her to his breast and kissed her vehemently, miserably, again and again. She disengaged herself, but, instead of smiling, began to cry. A moment afterwards she wiped her eyes.

"It's too bad," she said, looking away. "All our happiness—the whole future—ruined by one

dreadful old man!" And she walked off quickly to the farmhouse, to hide her face in her motherly mother's lap.

Bart Visser also went back to his mother, the schoolmaster's widow, in her humbler cottage against the firs. The shadows were sloping downwards; the day was sinking to rest. During their five-o'clock dinner he remained silent, absorbed in reflections on ecclesiasticism as contrasted with theology, and religion as estranged from both. His mother, a proud smile of approval on her countenance, left him to what she believed was prayerful consideration of his coming discourse. For her, as she sat munching her cabbage and sausages, this world had but little left to pray over. True, she had prayed much, and worked more, through the slow past years. In poverty and hard battle and desperate longing she had dragged her only child to the foot of the pulpit he was now preparing to mount. And now Providence, that had often seemed inimical, had blessed her beyond her wildest aspirations. For there are many pulpits in Holland, and but few within the circle of her rustic experience. Who could have dared to foretell that the young candidate's first trial sermon would be preached in the church that had seen him worship as a child? Not for a moment did she doubt that the manifest hand of God, which had removed the former pastor, would safely pilot the candidate into the vacant manse. She would see him settled as pastor of

her own village, the happy husband of a not impecunious and altogether delightful wife. Every time she realised this certain and immediate future, her eyes filled with joyful tears. In a few days, she felt, she could sing her "Nunc dimittis," with a reserve, as will occur, for a not too early hearing.

After dinner he came down to the lamp, with his manuscript in his hand. She established herself in her arm-chair and took up her needlework, trembling with glorious anticipation. Then he read, uninterruptedly, for little less than an hour. Occasionally his voice shook, but he eagerly steadied it. Half-way, she laid down her needlework in a tremble on her lap, and sat gazing at him. All her soul was in her face.

"Amen," he read, and remained silent, staring straight in front of him, away from her. She neither moved nor spoke. The whole room was full of a solemn stillness. And the look in the mother's eyes was adoration—of him.

The clock struck loudly, eight slow strokes, rousing him.

"I shall never be minister here," he said.

"What?" she screamed. Her needlework fell to the floor. "You frightened me," she said; "but you were always like that, Bart—no courage!"

"It wants more courage to preach that sermon than to leave it unpreached," he replied, nettled. "But I couldn't do better, if I tried."

"Nonsense!" said the mother. "It's beautiful."

"Beautiful or not, mother, it won't 'fetch' Elder Preek. And you know as well as I, that the others 'll look at him all the time. If he doesn't nod—and he *won't* nod—Heavens, I might speak with the tongues of men and of angels, what's the use, as long as I haven't got Elder Preek?"

She sat listening, long after he had ceased, bitterly, to speak. Then she gasped:

"Are you—sure?"

"Yes; and so are you."

"I don't mean about their going by him," she continued in a curious voice. "That I know. But about his not approving. Why?"

"Because I can't get into his religious twist, mother. It is all a religious twist. Didn't you see I hadn't got it, as I read?"

"No. I was only thinking of the beautiful, beautiful things you said."

"It's not the phraseology only. I've tried to use that as far as I honestly could," he continued, speaking more to himself than to her. "I've never said . . . but the subject's too holy to dwell upon." He shook himself irritably. "There lies my sermon!"—he pointed—"Jacta est alea!"

"What, dear?" Her voice quivered.

"The place is lost. I can't help myself."

"God will."

"No use asking Him. He can't."

Her lips framed two words, left unspoken. "I will," they said to herself.

Aloud she exclaimed, almost imperiously: "Read me parts again. Read them slowly. Parts you feel sure he will disapprove of."

"I have expunged those already," he said, with what would have been a twinkle had it not died into a frown. "Twice as many remain."

"Read!" she commanded, and he obeyed. It was a terrible reading, this second one, of fragments that rose out of the smoothness and cut them in the heart, sentences intended to be gentle and pious, that caught false reflections from the irony of his accent and features until they towered threatening above them, ready to fall and crush truth beneath their imaginary weight. Half-way she stopped him.

"True," she said: "it is not Neighbour Preek's religion. It is the religion of Jesus Christ."

He did not answer, for he could not. And so they sat in silence till there came a knocking at the door. Katrine stood before them. Her breast heaved, her cheeks were aflame.

He started up. "What is it?"

She dropped into a chair. "I was coming here," she said, "and Jan Jansen joined me. I think he had been watching for me. And he asked me—he!—to give you up and be his wife."

"Jan Jansen!" cried the widow, turning whiter than a sheet.

"Preek's nephew!" exclaimed the candidate.

"He's past forty, and a ne'er-do-weel, and he drinks!" cried the indignant damsel.

"Thirty-eight," gasped the widow. They both stared at her.

"Don't make him older or worse than he is," said the widow, recovering herself and speaking with asperity.

"He's old enough and bad enough," said the son.

"And like enough to be a dangerous rival to you, my boy," remarked his mother.

Katrine laughed, in scorn. "An enemy perhaps—not a rival," she said. "I'd die an old maid before I'd marry that boozing, bloated brute."

The widow shrank away as if in pain. "Yes, yes," she murmured. "True. You mustn't die an old maid, Katrine." And then the two lovers talked sadly of their prospects, while the mother stitched with downcast eyes.

Half an hour later he took his sweetheart home along the sleeping meadows, that breathe in sleep. The night was soft about them—he loved her as they went.

By the plank across the ditch she halted. "Father might see you!" she said, and, kissing him, went on alone.

She heard voices at the open door. Elder Preek was saying "Good-bye" to her father.

"Ah, here she is!" said the Elder. "Well, you can tell her what I came for."

"Tell her yourself," replied her father's fluent growl. He was a violent, bucolic, unreasonable man. Very different from thin Elder Preek, with his clear-cut nose and parchments death's-head, and pale cod-fish eyes.

"Well, my dear, I have come to your father to ask your hand for my nephew," announced the Elder.

"He shall have her," said the farmer.

"The young man is devotedly attached to you," continued Elder Preek. "Also he is not without earthly possessions."

"Fifteen thousand guilders," put in the farmer, with a cluck of his tongue.

"He drinks," said Katrine.

"Fie, for shame!" exclaimed the Elder.

"She shall take him," persisted her father.

"Where is your maiden modesty?" expostulated the Elder.

"I won't marry him," said Katrine.

"You shall marry no one else!" bellowed her father.

She was silent. In the dusk her whole attitude betokened rebelliousness.

"I want to marry Bart," she said.

Elder Preek gave a snarl, like a dog.

"All right!" laughed her father, spitefully.

"I swear you shall marry Jan Jansen, or, if you *don't* marry him, well, then—Bart!" He repeated the words with a truculent snigger. Already he saw her mistress of the fifteen thousand guilders.

"Bart! Oh, of course," said the Elder. "Oh,

yes, of course. Bart! Of course!" His tones were full of menace. He left the two standing in the dark by their doorstep, and walked away briskly out of sight. His homeward path led through a coppice and a short stretch of pine wood. It was very dark between the pines. He checked his pace, stumbling occasionally as he went.

A single star had pierced the blackness, shining clear through the tops of the trees.

"Lead us not into temptation!" said the Elder. He said it over and over again as he went along. He stopped to say it, with renewed energy. Then he knelt down in the dark, on the moss by the path-side, and prayed. He prayed for guidance, that, in his high office, he might remain impartial, as an elder should. He had run away from his human predilections by the farmhouse door. His prayer was honest enough in its way, Heaven, that listened to it, knows! He rose, greatly content with it, convinced of his moral victory, resolved to do his duty. The clerical question—solemn thought!—should remain entirely independent of the matrimonial one. The care of souls is not a thing to tamper with. And besides, there were always the fifteen thousand guilders to fall back upon. Whether Bart got the parish or not, Jan Jansen was a rich man compared with him.

The old man reached home with a countenance once more serene, or at any rate expressionless. His wife and children were accustomed to

see it so. The unmarried daughter got him his Saturday evening "pap"; the wife laid out his Sunday things, the black suit, the spotless linen. He cleaned and arranged his big spectacles as usual, and read the evening chapter out of Ezra, the maid-servant yawning as usual, especially on Saturdays, half dead with the scrubbings and sloppings, the earthly tribulation and manifold mess.

He was undressing with slow precision, and descanting to his humbly acquiescent wife on the sacred probabilities of the morrow, when a handful of gravel was thrown at the illuminated window-pane. "The young man may be very worthy, I do not doubt," he was saying, "but, personally, I am afraid of these young slips of theology. The Overstad Professors rely on their own talents and not on the *Word*. What, I ask, is theology without the *Word*? Well, we shall see what we shall see. But it isn't learning that makes men preachers. It is power. And what is power but acceptance of the Word? They say the Bible was written in Greek, the poor foolish ones! The Bible was written in our hearts."

His wife, who had heard all this daily for years, nodded approval, yawning nearly as distinctly as the maid had done. She started at the crash of the gravel, almost welcoming the diversion all the same.

It was a good thing the Elder had not reached his weekly tepid tub, or the whole course of

events would have been altered. Now he solemnly opened the window and solemnly demanded what was wrong.

"Come down! I must speak to you," replied a woman's voice.

"Bart's mother!" ejaculated the Elder, drawing back his head.

"Don't go—she will only bother you," expostulated the wife.

"I must," replied Preek, already readjusting his clothing.

She called out something after him about the water getting cold; but his even soul, suddenly fluttered, was not in a mood to think of tubs.

"What do you come here for at this time of night?" he cried, hurriedly letting the widow in and closing the door. His voice trembled, with forebodings of harm.

"Well," she replied, "you can't say I trouble you often. We haven't spoken to each other for—how long is it?—nigh on forty years."

"All the more reason for me to ask you why you come to me now, at ten o'clock at night, and fling gravel at the window."

"I didn't want to disturb your children or the neighbours," she made answer. Her voice also, in its gasps, betrayed emotion. She caught at the shawl about her throat and tore it away.

"Sit down," he suggested.

"No," she said, quickly, like a blow. And, fighting for breath as she stood against the wall, she continued: "My son's future is in your

hands to-morrow. I have come about that. You know it. You must get him the parish."

"That will not depend upon any favouritism of mine," he answered. "The Lord——"

She waved the phrase aside. "Forty years ago you also used such words as those," she said.

"I confess it," he answered humbly. "But forty years ago I did not mean them; now I do."

"I also mean what I say," she retorted grimly. "Conversation is best on those terms. Would that ours had always been such! And I say that you, who can do it, must do this thing for my son, Bart. *Must!*—do you hear?"

"Must me no musts!" he cried, turning fiercely—yet weakly, as a cat, not a dog, turns at bay.

In her face was the dog's resolve. "We understand each other," she said. "For nigh on forty years I have not darkened your door. The last time I stood here, on this very spot, a girl of eighteen, I had come to plead for my child. You sent me away."

"I looked after the child," he said sullenly.

"Now I am here again. Never should I have darkened this door, Jan Preek, but for the madness of a mother's love! Nor shall I slink away now, as I did then, to hide myself and my child from your sight. To-morrow I shall sit opposite you in the church. I shall watch you all the time. You shall nod that cursed nod of yours that the angels laugh at—or weep; you shall

sit nodding like a—like a Chinese doll, you scoundrel!”

He put up his hand. “Do not call me that!” he cried pleadingly.

She stopped, aghast, all her eloquence checked. “I—not—to call you that?”

“I wasn’t converted then, Mary. Not that I should dare to call myself converted now. But I was a young man. It’s as the twenty-fifth Psalm says: ‘Remember not the transgressions of my youth——’”

“And I don’t remember them,” she interrupted violently. “I’ve kept out of your way, as you’ve kept out of mine. But now, by the Heaven that hears me, you shall do this thing for my son!”

“Isn’t the other your son as well?” he cried. “You forget that the one son’s hope is the other son’s despair!”

“I forget nothing. Could I but forget Jan Jansen! The other day he came up behind me in a narrow path. ‘Get out of my way!’ he says, drunk—and went stumbling by. ‘That’s my son,’ says I: ‘thank God no one knows it but I—and you!’” She pointed her finger on the old man’s breast. Then she broke out: “He’s not my son, not he, not my son. Bart’s my son, that’s the light of my eyes! Bart’s my son, that’s as unlike the other as my husband was unlike you!”

“At any rate, you’ve little cause to complain. He doesn’t shame you as he shames me, my

precious so-called nephew. And all my own children so respectable! Oh, dear! But look here, Mary"—his tone grew bright and business-like—"this marriage with Katrine 'll be the saving of him. He's mad to have her, and he'll promise anything. He's going to take the pledge To save a sinner—eh? And that your own son?"

He peered into her face. She gazed steadily back.

"Not as good as Bart, I grant you," he went on. "But there's more joy in heaven—you remember? He'll settle down and grow serious, as many a man has done!"

"As you have done," she answered.

"My sins are as scarlet. I trust that some day they may become whiter than snow."

"If they don't, it won't be for want of plastering," she replied, misjudging him to the end, in her bitter sense of injury. "Well, you must know what you do. I'm going back. If you don't nod approval of the sermon to-morrow——" she paused. He looked at her anxiously.

"If you don't—I get up at the end of the service and tell the story of Jan Jansen to the whole congregation."

He still gazed at her. It was no use trying to weaken the meaning in those steadfast eyes of hers.

"My wife!" he gasped.

"Look to her. That is your affair, not mine. I have never troubled her, nor you. I have no desire to trouble her now. And *you*"—she

clenched her fist—"you would ruin my child's happiness!"

"But you don't understand," he protested, desperately. "It isn't a question of wanting or not wanting. My conscience——"

"Go, talk about that with Jan Jansen," she answered, and left him.

He continued after her, following to the door: "The things of the house of the Lord, entrusted to my keeping——"

But she only turned in the dark and the night-wind: "What I have sworn I have sworn," she said.

Like a man dazed he groped his way upstairs, to be scolded by his wife because the water had gone cold. For the first time since their marriage he got into his bed this Saturday night unwashed. What was the use of cleansing? He could not wash his soul.

Not that the weight of ancient sin lay heavy upon it. There was little room in his religion for regrets at the inevitable perversity of the old Adam. Sin, in fact, was its corner-stone. Nothing could be more gratifying than conviction of sin, especially as the wrong-doing was always past and over before the conviction came. You were convinced of your own dead sins or of your neighbour's active ones. But the sudden results of your transgression alive and screaming around you—these were a very different matter.

He tossed in his bed till he could endure the strain no longer. His was not the sort of piety

that can pray lying down or in unspoken words. He got out on to the floor, in the chill darkness, and, kneeling by the bedside, poured forth continuous pleadings for a way of escape. What he asked, but did not hope for, was simply that the young man's sermon might prove a truly orthodox one, a source of blessing unto many, a legitimate recommendation to all. What appeal could be more righteous? If it were not granted, then he, the Elder, would fall as a martyr to the holiest of human responsibilities—he shuddered as he thought of the depth of the fall. His home life, as a husband and father, his public position, his name as a shepherd of other people's souls! He groaned aloud, praying on and on. His wife awoke and asked if anything was the matter. He answered that he was wrestling with the Devil. She turned on her side and slept. To himself, however, he felt that he was wrestling with God.

Yet the struggle was clearer than when, a couple of hours ago, he had wanted to act on Jan Jansen's behalf. Now he was being tempted, in the saving of himself, to lie against the Almighty. All this he saw distinctly, black and white in the routine of his theological reasoning. He shrank down quivering against the counterpane, and prayed.

In the morning his daughter found him absent-minded. She was not surprised, considering the importance of the approaching function. She saw his lips move repeatedly, and awe fell upon her.

The first face that he beheld in the full village

church was the widow's. When the organ pealed forth the loud words of the opening psalm, in an outburst of voices, he had issued from the vestry with the other office-bearers, preceding the minister, as the custom is. He had walked to his place in the chancel, beside the rest, and, turning from a brief inspection of the inside of his hat (an inevitable form), his eyes had looked straight into the widow's. Those were the first eyes he saw during the whole preliminary service, and the only ones. They remained with him, steadily, deep down in his soul. His children were in church, of course, and his wife; he had made some feeble attempt to keep her away, but she had stared at him in uncomprehending astonishment.

He settled himself in his corner for the sermon; and to God, Who beheld him, there must have been an agony of petition in the sharp-set face. It was a last desperate appeal, for himself, for the congregation—a hope against hope. The nervous young candidate gave out his text: "That your love may abound!" His voice quivered with the weight of the words. Elder Preek's thin lips seemed to sink away. The subject foreboded evil—he had never seen much good come of youthful talk about "love." "The Word" wasn't love.

The widow's eyes were upon him. Many of the congregation frequently looked his way. His colleagues watched for his well-known signs of approval. Solemnly he sat there, as judge.

Solemnly, in the listening silence, the discourse flowed on. The young minister, gaining confidence, spoke straight from the heart to the heart. But that comes as an insult to a religious development which requires speech from the head to the head. Nevertheless, many there, especially among the women, were touched by his simple sincerity. It became evident that the current of feeling was favourable to the preacher; his audience were with him; he realised it, as every speaker in such a case must do. From his pulpit he could not catch sight of Elder Preek. It was his turn to hope against hope.

Elder Preek had given up hoping. He sat desperately, his head thrown back, with the eyes of the congregation upon him, fronting ruin.

One little motion of the head! One little motion! Just a feeble sign that he approved of this sentimental twaddle about love and charity and goodness, and all would be well. He was saved; his home-happiness, his high position intact. After all, the things the boy was saying were true enough, up to a point. There was no harm in them. No harm? In this false presentation of Jehovah? Better the lies of atheism than this half-truth of love.

"Amen!" said the preacher. The Elder started, and a strange sound escaped from his parched throat. The last word had rung his knell. There is still an immense difference between the chance you have resolved not to use and no chance at all.

Of the closing prayer and the singing he heard nothing. Nor did he hear the benediction; but he heard, as the congregation was rising, the widow's voice cry: "Stop!" She spoke very rapidly, and loudly, less like a speech than a cry.

"This man!" she exclaimed, pointing. She stood up in her seat, challenging him. The whole congregation, curious, expectant—all the familiar faces—grouped untidily in the crowded aisle and side-seats, the whole mass of noisy humanity, suddenly hushed.

"This man, whom you have chosen as your spiritual adviser, whom you follow as sheep, do you know what he is? A father of illegitimate children, a hypocrite, and a rogue!"

Protests arose at this violation of the sacred edifice and ceremony; but "Hush! Hush!" cried other voices, anxious to know more.

"Jan Jansen, whom he calls his nephew, is his son!" screamed the widow. "And why doesn't he approve of my son's sermon? Because of religion and morality? Because he wants Katrine Dykmans to marry Jan Jansen, and, if Bart gets the church, she'll marry *him*!"

One of the other elders had lifted his hand to command silence. The sexton had drawn near to remove the cause of this disturbance, but a couple of men that were by her pushed him back.

The candidate stood, white, in his pulpit. All his agony found utterance in one cry: "Mother, don't!"

"Peace!" said the old man, who had lifted his hand. "Go thy ways!"

But now the wife of Preek intervened. She was in the front, red and shaking with indignation.

"No, indeed,—no, by Heaven!" she said: "every soul that has heard the woman speak shall hear her words proved a lie."

The widow turned to her with contemptuous pity. "Poor creature, I am sorry for *you*," she said.

"It is a lie! Say that it is a lie, Preek!" The wretched wife waited for a moment in silence.

Preek gazed back at the sea of faces. His lips did not move.

She flung back to the widow. "What ghost of a proof have you that Jansen is his son?"

"He is mine," replied the widow. "His and mine."

A thrill ran through the building. Bart fell forward on the cushion, his head sinking to prayer.

"I was a girl of eighteen," continued the widow, "in service at Overstad. We were secretly engaged. Ten years later I married the schoolmaster here."

In the long, dead silence, "It is true," said Preek.

To his astonishment he saw by their expressions that they were not inclined to be hard on him for the sins of his youth. He followed up his advantage.

"I couldn't marry her," he said quickly; "but I took care of the child."

"Yes," cried the widow; "he bought the child a lot in the lottery, and it turned up a prize!"

Then suddenly he realised that, by this betrayal, his cause was lost. No religious man among them had ever played in the lottery, and such as had done so had never gained a prize. A loud murmur of disapproval ran straight down the aisle.

His brethren in the sacred office drew away from him. He was left standing alone. He lifted his poor trembling hands to Heaven.

"The zeal of Thine house," he said, in a voice little louder than a whisper, "hath eaten me up!"

Farmer Dykmans stood in front of the churchwardens' pew, shaking a gigantic fist.

"And ye fancied," he bellowed, "that I'd bestow my daughter on a drunken blackguard as hasn't even got a name of his own?"

The minister still lay forward, sunk low, with his head on the cushion. In the face of the whole congregation Katrine ran up the pulpit stairs, and bending over him, put her arm about his neck.

A ARGYMENT

"NO," said Baas Slimmer, standing, his legs apart, among the cackling hens and chickies of his farm-yard. "No! No! No!" He said each "No" louder, till the last was quite a shout. Nobody minded much: the whole place was full of live stock, but everybody was thinking of himself—of his or her immediate opportunities for eating more than was good for them. It was feeding-time, as could be perceived by the distant grunts and shrieks and lowings from the out-houses on opposite sides of the great open square. The farmer himself had thrown an indignant handful of corn among his couple of hundred barn-door fowls, and the lot of them were fighting and squeaking and treading the babies underfoot. The infants emerged, with a pee-ep, and hastily swallowed their share.

"No!" shouted the Baas.

The buxom farm-wife came out at the open door—one of those Dutch back-doors that break in half, so you can lean over the middle and chat. *She* cared, up to a reasonable point of disturbed placidity. For with the happy *insouciance* of the so-called dumb creatures, who are not dumb at all, only deaf, mercifully deaf, to the cruel things

we say—with the cheerful ignorance about coming evils which is God's chief boon to his beasts in a world of suffering, with this foolishly blessed indifference to possibilities, the thousand little souls (of a sort) that filled the farm and its fields remained callous to the moods of the man who was lord of the life of each one of them. We men can do a lot of harm, and we willingly do it, but it is only to one another that we can cause prospective pain. And that, really, under the circumstances, is something the brutes, if they knew, might be thankful for. The farm-wife, when her master barked very loud, had to come and see what was the matter. Though she knew, from long experience, that a-many barks went to one bite.

"Dear! dear!" she said, standing with a big scarlet platter against her hip. "And what are you shouting at now, Slimmer? The wind? It'll blow, all the same."

"Why, that's out of the Bible, too!" replied Slimmer.

"Dear me, so it is," said the farm-wife, pleased.

"Don't you go quoting the Bible at me like Stott," continued Slimmer grumpily. "'Tisn't fair." He looked round on the hens scuffling all about his feet. "A body can't say nothing to answer to the Bible," he said. "The Bible isn't argument." ("Argyment," he called it.) "The Bible isn't argyment. No more that *that* is!" He pointed to the squabbling fowls. "There's no sense in *that*, and the Bible's above sense, but neither of 'em's argyment."

Vrouw Slimmer had long ago abandoned all attempts at unravelling her husband's tangled syllogisms. She never even puckered her brows now over them; she simply said, "What were you shouting at?"

"I wasn't shouting. I was argufying the matter out to myself. Is it Yes or No? I was asking myself quite gently. And I reasoned out that it was No."

The farm-wife shrugged her shoulders. "All that fuss," she said scornfully, "about killing a pig."

"A pig!" bellowed the farmer. "As if I should argufy about a pig!"

"You'd argufy about anything, Slimmer. I thought it was that mangy black porker that the butcher from Overstad was wanting to buy."

"You were wrong, then," remarked Slimmer, pulling out his pipe, "as you always are. You just jump at things. Like all women. Poor unreasonable things. They jabber and jabber: they haven't time to argufy."

"Poor things!" said the Vrouw, sarcastic.

"Now a man like me," continued the Baas, "he always knows when he's wrong. For why? He reasons it all out, and he sees at once where he went off his count. It's like counting apples. You can't say there's twenty-four if I've counted twenty-three." He faced her triumphantly: "You can't say there's twenty-four——"

"Oh, yes, yes," she interrupted, turning back to her kitchen. "I can reason, too," she called

hastily. "There's something smelling that means a burn!" she called, and disappeared.

But she was back again, soon enough, leaning over her green-painted door. "Now, what's this fresh fuss about?" she asked, in a wheedling tone.

"Fuss?" he answered sardonically, pulling at his pipe. "There's no fresh fuss, no more than there was this morning. Trust a woman to come fussing about a fuss."

"Well, a woman didn't begin it this morning," expostulated Vrouw Slimmer.

"And what's Stott but an old woman?" came the adroit reply. "I don't call him a man. He's an old woman, he is."

"And what were you shouting 'No!' about?" wheedled the farm-wife. "About 'Koos'? We'll soon see if the boy's as good as Stott thinks. And I hope he may be. You weren't bothering your head about that?"

Her husband eyed her, under his drooping lids. A tall, lean man, with a canny face, all wrinkles. "What an intelligent head!" thought the summer visitors, as they watched him gazing up at the preacher in church. The minister held a different opinion.

"Curious!" said Slimmer slowly. "That curious! A woman'd pull down a stone wall to see if there wasn't a toad inside!"

"And quite right, too," replied his better half, "if the poor things live in 'em a thousand years, as I've heard, without bite nor——"

"There never was a woman since Eve——"

"Oh, be quiet about Eve. That's all most of you men read your Bibles for—to say snappy things to us about Eve!"

"Woman, you're profane," replied the Baas; "as profane as the hens." And they both laughed, he noiselessly, she aloud. For, at this morning's "visiting," the solemn annual event when the minister calls with an elder and exhorts the whole household, collected in the kitchen, had not a fat white hen, in the midst of the proceedings, scratched her way into the minister's wide-awake hat, in a corner on the floor, and there laid a much be-cackled egg! And had it not proved quite impossible afterwards to make Micken and Piet and the rest of the dull, rubicund farm-servants realise that there was only an episode which everybody ought to forget? Nay—far worse—this is what actually occurred:

The hen ran about and cackled, and the pale-faced minister, unsmiling, talked on. His elder, Jacob Stott, the pork-butcher, sat frowning and wrathful. The Baas and his wife looked uncomfortable, feeling somehow personally responsible for their fowl; the young people giggled all round.

"And, as I was remarking," declaimed the minister, "how, if you do not come to church"—raising his voice in the din—"can you expect to be benefited by the sermon?"

"Koos, put that hen out!" shouted Slimmer. The young hand jumped up with alacrity and

made a grab in the direction of the flutter and noise. All he caught was empty space and a bump. He righted himself with another swift sweep at the screeching biped; but the hen had dashed against the farm-wife's petticoats, and up on the great open "Book," and away over Stott's apoplectic head, and everybody had risen now and was talking and laughing at once. Only the butcher sat gurgling indignant protests. He said it was done on purpose, from opposition to the true "Confession" and hatred of "the Word," just the thing that a rationalist like Slimmer—but nobody heard him, for they were all far too busy catching the hen.

All except the farmer's ten-year-old grandson Tony. Tony had no time for the bird: he was too busy with the egg. He had taken up the egg very quietly, and, with tender solicitude, he had deposited it gently in the middle of the cushions of the minister's arm-chair. "It would have been a pity," he said softly to himself, "if anybody had stepped on that egg." But, once having taken these precautions, it must be admitted that no one joined more vigorously in the search than Master Tony. In fact, it was he who ultimately bundled the flurried heap of feathers out at the door. Then everybody sat down again. The minister sat down last.

He first stood smoothing the ruffled pages of the family Bible. He did it with a slow and loving touch. He was giving the people time to collect themselves. And, as a matter of fact,

they were eager to do so. They were by no means naturally inclined to irreverence—far from it. He had taken the best means of calming them, as he stood there, sweetly pensive, his gentle fingers lingering about the sacred page.

Then the minister sat down on the egg. He let himself down slowly. There wasn't an ear in the kitchen but heard the crunch.

He was a young man, athletic outside his clerical habit. It was wonderful how quickly he was up again and had whisked round to inspect the seat of the disturbance. As his other side flashed into view for the whole of the semicircle, not a mouth, except Stott's, but sent forth a roar. The minister whisked around once more: he had drawn forth a long white handkerchief; he stood rubbing himself, a lank black figure.

"Can I help your reverence?" asked the farm-wife, as grave as the circumstances would allow. Graver.

"I thank you, Vrouw," replied the minister. He was young: he was momentarily ridiculous: he felt his high office, and a great deal of stickiness, and cruel insult from somebody unknown.

But at that stage, in the general atmosphere of hysterical merriment and disapproval, somebody set up a howl. That somebody proved to be Koos, the charity-child, the new "boy," twelve years old, who had come in last Monday, on sufferance, and done something wrong ever since he came. Everybody looked at him at once, and he howled the louder. The Baas had

turned upon him his customary threatening frown.

"'Twasn't me, Baas!" he howled. "'Twasn't me!"

"Then who was it?" demanded his master.

"Ay, who was it?" repeated the minister.

"Did anybody say it was you?" asked the farmer's wife. Tony peeped forth behind his grandmother's skirts.

"The Baas glared at me so!" squeaked the miserable urchin.

"Glare? Do I glare?" cried the furious Slimmer.

"You had better confess," said the minister, still mopping. (But you can't mop it off: it's no good.)

"You put it down, without thinking, as you ran after the hen," prompted the Vrouw good-naturedly.

"Without thinking, of course," echoed Slimmer. "Haven't I pointed out to you a dozen times a day——"

"Confess," repeated the minister, for that was his religious solution of every difficulty—"Confess and be absolved"—as the lawyer's is, "Confess and be condemned."

"I—I—didn't——"

"Koos!" There was a painful silence. Everybody waited.

"Well, p'raps I did," gasped Koos. He wanted, in the first place, all those eyes off him. There was a general movement of relief.

"Why did you tell lies before?" questioned his master.

"I—I didn't remember. If I did it, it must have been as missus says, when I was running after the—I must have caught it up to save it, and put it down without thinking——" He hurried on, along his only plausible line of defence.

"You come straight away with me," said Baas Slimmer darkly. "Ever since I took ye you've been getting into mischief. And now to go playing such a trick on his reverence! And to tell lies over it! You're a wicked boy, you are. I'll teach you to tell lies. You're a liar!" He walked to the door; the boy howled louder than ever.

"He isn't," interposed a burly voice. "He isn't." Butcher Stott stood out, red. "I won't stand by and hear one of our church children called names," said Butcher Stott. "He's as good a boy as ever had a good up-bringing. As good as all the other parish-boys."

The minister smiled apologetically, as a man whose duty it is to recognise a fallacy when he sees one.

"Four and twenty years," continued Butcher Stott, "have I been a member of the board, Slimmer. *You* don't trouble about that sort of work for others, you don't. And never a boy but has turned out well, in all that time, thanks to *our* up-bringing. Every mother's son of 'em has done well," he repeated emphatically, "except

them as did better, and died." His voice dropped ; there must have been a soft spot somewhere in the big, apoplectic pork-butcher. He walked across and deliberately placed his fat hand on the shock head of the sobbing boy.

"No, he didn't do it! He didn't do it," squeaked Tony in a frightened treble.

"Hush, child ; you shut your silly mouth!" admonished his grandmother, and pushed him back behind her ample gown.

"Don't advance more than you can prove, Brother Stott," suggested the minister gently ; but that was fuel to the fire with the elder, well known to be as stubborn as he was soft.

"I can prove every word of it," said Stott doggedly. "And that's more than Slimmer can do. There was Kupkens, that rides his blue gig this day ; there was Pottel, that wags his tongue in the—I beg your reverence's pardon! But there! it's casting pearls before swine—not including your reverence, of course." He shook himself and stepped back. "That boy's a good boy," he persisted. "Like all the rest. It's the edification"—he meant education—"does it."

"A boy can be edified and go wrong all the same!" cried Slimmer. "To say a boy can't go wrong 'cause he's been taught different isn't argyment."

"Isn't argyment? Isn't argyment?" stuttered Stott.

"No, brother, no ; it isn't argument," said the minister. He was still rubbing. Occasionally

he stopped, but then, in sheer stickiness, began again.

"Isn't argyment?" cried Stott, purple in the face, falling back and staring at the lot of them. "And, pray, what does the Scripture mean, your reverence, when it says, Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old—when he is old——" He floundered. Nobody helped him out.

"That boy isn't old," objected the argumentative Slimmer.

"You say it, Koos." Stott pushed the child forward.

"He will not depart from it," said the charity-child.

"The devil can quote Scripture to his purpose," remarked the Baas sententiously. And the servants all hee-hawed with delight at their master's 'cuteness. Oh, he was 'cute, was old Slimmer. Better not "argy" with him!

"But he can't change it," retorted Stott triumphantly. He had his triumph, if it was one, all to himself. Slimmer's servants understood only Slimmer's successes. And the minister disapproved, as unprofessional, of theological discussions, in his presence, by members of his flock.

"These children," continued the pork-butcher, elder, and poor guardian, unabashed, "have been brought up in the path. They was never whipped, but they was told it was the path, and so they couldn't depart from it. See this boy say his

text pat! He's a good boy or the Bible's wrong, minister. You can't get away from that!"

"H'm! H'm!" said the minister.

"Now, which is it to be, your reverence?"

Slimmer came to his pastor's rescue. "The Bible isn't argyment," he said.

"You're a infidel," responded the elder. "It's rank blasphemy to hear you talk, and his reverence standing by! Now, the children that's brought up in *your* house"—he pointed a fat finger at Tony, who had ventured forward, open-mouthed, and now hastily retreated—"if *they* was to go losing their bearings, it wouldn't be——"

"You leave that child alone!" burst out the grandfather, suddenly infuriate. "That child's been brought up by a angel in heaven!" His voice faltered. "If that child isn't as good as gold, then your Bible is *wrong*," he said.

"Hush! Hush!" interposed the minister. There was no use, surely, in continuing the visitation. He lifted his hand for the benediction and passed majestically out. A titter ran behind him.

"I'd better take this boy along with me, as he doesn't suit," said the elder, pausing near the doorway. The boy's heart gave a leap.

"And who's to pay me for the damage he's done?" demanded Slimmer. He pointed to the chair. "My mother's chair," he said solemnly. "She stitched every stitch of it herself."

"The pretty dove with the olive-branch," said the sorrowing Vrouw.

"They'll think it's the flood, begun over again," replied the heartless elder. He reflected: the place was a good one; the couple worthy, in spite of the husband's fierce manner at times. "I'll leave him with you," he said measuredly, "if you'll promise not to ill-treat him. I'll leave him with you a whole month, to work off the damage, and that's handsome, for if he done it, he done it by accident and no harm intended. And at the end of that month you'll tell me he's a good boy, and then"—he threw out his chest—"then we'll *know* who was right." He waved his hand to the Vrouw. "I can trust *you*," he said. "Slimmer is cranky, and his religion isn't orthydox. But you'll do the right thing by me and the boy, and the blessed Bible, and you won't say he's a bad boy when he isn't."

"Well, brother?" queried the minister, turning back to the door.

"Coming, your reverence. Is it a bargain, Vrouw?"

The boy was a strong boy and a willing. "I'll keep him a month," said Slimmer, nodding. "And if he's a good boy all the time—well, that's argyment." He walked out after the minister, showing him respectfully across the yard.

"It was *his* imp; I saw it myself," whispered Micken to Piet.

"Hold your tongue. 'Tis as much as your place is worth," answered Piet. "See how the master burst out when they talked about his daughter!"

For, indeed, all that was happiest in Hendrik Slimmer had been put away, a few months ago, in his darling daughter's grave. All her life she had done what he wanted her to do, excepting in the grave case of her marriage, and then he had argued himself into accepting her point of view. It had taken him three months, but he had done it. It was natural, after all, that a girl should love a smart young soldier; it was reasonable that the soldier should carry her off to the Indies; it wasn't illogical that he, being a brave man, should fall there in battle, dying a hero's death. The widow need not have followed him within a year, consigning her only boy to her parents. Still, even that was like the dear, fond, beautiful creature. She could do no wrong, and whatever she stood responsible for, including Tony, must be reasoned out right. Thus it was that, a couple of hours after the minister had left, Baas Slimmer stamped about the courtyard, meeting Stott's base insinuation of possible error in the immaculate grandchild with an ever-increasingly vehement "No!"

"Imagine!" he said to Vrouw Slimmer. "Comparing Hendrika's child with a ne'er-do-well parish waif!"

"But he *was* strong," objected the wife, frowning heavily, "with his Bible argyment."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the exasperated farmer. "I tell you the Bible *isn't* argyment. The Bible's religion. 'The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.' *That's* common-sense. I've been

thinking it over ever since the minister went. That's proverbs, and proverbs is the aggravated wisdom of the centuries, as I read the other day, and it's very true."

"Is it Bible proverbs?" asked the good wife anxiously.

"No, it's not. It's just human reasoning. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"But the other must be true if it's in the Bible," said the Vrouw.

He exploded at female perversity, and strode up and down, kicking his feet right and left, so that the fowls scurried away all around him.

"Then the boy didn't lie about not having done it!" he cried. "And he didn't confess afterwards that he had! And he didn't put the egg into the minister's chair, making us a scandal and a disgrace, with our visitation, all over the village! Oh, you old women, Stott and you!"

"We shall soon see what he's made of," she said, troubled.

He came back to her. "We shall indeed," he said, dropping his voice. "Off he goes in half an hour, or I'm much mistaken. I've given him a big bag of apples to count. 'There, count 'em,' I says; 'I don't know how many there are.' But I *do* know. There's two hundred and thirteen. There'll not be more than two hundred and twelve, I guess, in that sack, when he brings it round to me."

"Oh, is that fair?" she exclaimed.

"Fair? It's what they call a Jew-dicial inquiry.

Proof positive of Elder Stott's up-bringing—yah! Do you think I'm going to be beaten in a argyment by Elder Stott? D'ye think"—he came and stood in front of her—"there's a soul in the village don't know I can argy better than Elder Stott? Where'd I be? Tell me that," he cried—"if I was beaten in a argyment by Elder Stott!"

"You can't beat the Bible," she said stolidly.

"A pork-butcher," he answered, "yah!"

"And they do bring up the children good as gold," she added.

"I do believe you want the boy to prove an angel," he said.

"Yes, I do. Poor little orphan chap!"

At this moment the youth in question appeared in the door of an out-house and advanced, stumbling under the weight of his bulgy sack.

"Come along!" cried the farmer. "Come here, Koos! Put it down, boy. Put it down. Now, how many apples are there in that sack?"

The boy thrust his burden from him, and waited a moment, gasping for breath.

"Now, then, speak up!" cried the farmer triumphantly. "And let me tell you beforehand that I know!"

"If you know, why must I tell you?" said Koos.

"None of your lip to me!" cried Slimmer. "You answer me immediately! Now?"

"There's two hundred and thirteen. I counted 'em three times," said Koos.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Vrouw.

Her husband turned on her. "Hold your tongue, you fool!"

The boy looked surprised. "Tony helped me to count," he said.

"Aha!"—it was the farmer's turn, a great deal louder than his wife. His little plan of proof had failed, but no wonder. Frustrated by the presence of that innocent child. "Very well," he said with dignity. "Very well. Go away now, and do something else."

"And what am I to do, please, master?"

"Ask Piet," said the Baas, collecting his thoughts.

"Go and clean yourself for dinner," said the farm-wife.

The boy slouched away.

"Please, Baas, I want a word with you," spoke Micken. She was scarlet in the face, but, then, she was always that. Her manner, however, betokened unusual agitation.

"Be quick, then! I don't want to be bothered."

"Piet says it's as much as my place is worth, but I can't help it. I can't stand by and see the innocent respected" (suspected, she meant).

"You mind your own business, Micken!"

"Why, isn't this a Jew-dicial inquiry?" cried the Vrouw. Her curiosity was eager for a cue.

"It was Tony put the egg down; I saw him do it," gasped the maid.

There was a moment's silence. Then the Baas said, "I don't believe it."

"I can prove it!" cried Mieken.

"If it's proved, I must believe it," said Slimmer.

"For Piet saw him, too," said the maid.
"And so did Koos, for the matter of that."

"Well, after all, it was only a bit of mischief in the child," began the Vrouw. "He didn't mean no serious harm. And a egg's a very tempting thing, for a bit of mischief, for any child, and so it is!"

"Go, Mieken!" said the farmer, with averted face. "Go, tidy yourself for your dinner."

"And you come too, Baas," said the wife.

"No, no, I don't want any dinner."

"What nonsense, man!"

"I can't see Tony!"

Immediately her manner changed. "Why, husband!" She came close beside him.

"It's not his playing a trick, though I couldn't have done that at his age. But it's his letting us think it was the other boy."

"Why, he's only a child. He was afraid."

"His mother's son couldn't tell a lie, and his father's son wouldn't be afraid. The apple doesn't fall——"

"Oh, you argufy and argufy!" cried the Vrouw. "You should stick to your Bible, Slimmer!"

"What?" he exclaimed, exasperated. "You take Stott's side? That's the worst of all. Stott is right, then, and I am wrong?"

"The boy's a good boy, sure enough; he

wouldn't tell of Tony. I'll remember that." She nodded meaningly.

"And Stott is right when he argufies that Hendrika's child——"

She laughed aloud. "No, he's wrong; don't you see that, stupid? For that child has been trained by a angel, as you said. All the same, he ain't a saint."

"But I'm just as wrong as he," cried Slimmer, "for the apple——"

She put up both hands to her ears. "Oh, you argufy and argufy till you're crazed," she said.

Something plucked at her gown.

"Please, grandmother! Please, grandfather!" said a feeble voice. Master Tony stepped in front of the couple. His manner was determined, though his colour was faint. "Please, grandfather, I put the egg there," said Tony, and closed his eyes, awaiting his fate.

"Oh, Tony, how could you be so careless!" cried the condoning Vrouw.

"No, I did it on purpose," said Tony.

"But what for?" demanded his grandfather.

"For fun."

"I don't understand," said Slimmer.

"I do," said the helpful Vrouw.

"But, then, why do you come and tell us now?" persisted the grandfather. "Did Mieken advise you to?"

"Mieken? No, I came of myself," replied the young man proudly. "I remembered what mother always used to say."

"What did she say?" asked the Vrouw, in a whisper.

"Be good if you can, and, if you can't, be honest," came the prompt reply.

Radiant, the old woman drew the old man aside. "You'll believe in the Bible next time," she said.

He turned quickly to his grandson. "Why didn't you be honest at once?" he said.

"I did try to speak, but grandmother wouldn't let me. So I thought I'd wait till the minister was gone." A pause.

"I stayed with Koos, so you couldn't hurt him," continued the child eagerly, "and I helped him with the apples, and I told him I was coming to tell you. And so I did."

Baas Slimmer gazed sternly at his little grandson. "You'll have to go and 'pologize to his reverence, young man," he said. "And take a note from me to ask his reverence to punish you as he thinks best."

"Yes, granfer," said Tony, with a gulp.

"I should think, in all probability, he'll give you a good beating."

Tony was unable to express his feelings.

"Aren't you afraid to go?"

No answer.

"Say: aren't you afraid?"

"Yes, granfer. But mother said——" A dead stop.

The old Vrouw bent over him. "Well, Tony?"

"Mother said"—a sob—"that father always said, 'twasn't no shame being afraid, but"—another sob—"not doing things because you was."

"And you think so, too, Tony?"

"I'm going to be like father was."

Old Slimmer caught his grandson's arm in a grip that made the young hero squeal. "Now," he turned to his wife with fierce joy, "was I right or was I wrong? An apple——"

"Oh, you argufy——" smiled the farm-wife.

"I don't argufy," replied her husband impressively. "I never argufy. I goes by proof."

THE CONTRACT

HE was a man of business. So he was a cheat. The world he lived in highly honoured him. In America, to become President of a Trust or of a Republic, it is necessary to teach, or at least to have taught, in a Sunday school. Thomas van Crook, not living in the American Koopstad, could peacefully sleep away his well-earned Sunday afternoons. He disapproved of Sunday schools. He said that they delegated to strangers the holiest duties of the parent.

He was a churchwarden. That may not have been necessary, but in his particular gin-trade it was desirable. For his peculiar business was the purchase on a large scale of the cereals, etc., required in the production of inferior spirits and cheap coloured liqueurs. It was an international business. Potatoes and beetroot in vast quantities from Germany; maize from America; glycerine for the sticky drinks; saccharine for the sweet ones; chemical essences with some fancy taste of fruit, from factories all over the world. These things he passed on to the distillers, who founded seventeen successful eye-openers and nightcaps upon the potato alone.

His summers the merchant spent in a rural neighbourhood, not more than fifty miles from his office. He had a cottage there covered with crimson rambler and honeysuckle. It was always freshly painted and in excellent repair, like all things dependent on him, himself included. He liked the peaceful Saturday to Monday amidst his prosperous family ; he approved of the drowsy village church, in whose prominent pew a clean-shaven, red-necked city potentate, with stiff white collar and benignant eye, cut a figure deserving notice by God and inferior men.

Always he listened to the sermon, and frequently he enjoyed it. He would drop away for ten minutes unavoidably while calculating gains and losses on the Corn Exchange, but he easily and willingly returned to the familiar estimate of sin and faith. Sunday after Sunday the minister reckoned out that illogical equation and balanced x with x . The corn-buying churchwarden nodded acceptance ; there were no fluctuations in parsonry as in his own terribly speculative trade.

In his religion, which was all theology, he was perfectly sincere. There was nothing of the hypocrite about this man. Unless you fully understand this, his little bit of story can have no interest for you. Read some simpler tale of a facile Uriah Heep.

He had grown up in a parody of Calvinism, sucking it in with his mother's milk and unconsciously seeing it lived all day around him. Made sure of his own election one morning by some

wonderful chance—one against ten thousand—he had settled down into the easy conviction that man is very evil and God is very good. Henceforth all the rest was plain sailing. He read constantly the word of the Bible, not its contents ; he prayed daily, against no individual sin. How could he have reproached himself with errors, of whose existence he was quite unaware ! Had any one suggested to him that religion and life were not inextricably intermingled, he would have burst out in indignant disclaimers. “ Faith without works,” he would have repeated, “ is dead.”

He was a loving husband and father, the happy head of a united household, the careful tender of a sheltered home. His wife and children adored him. His servants and the clerks in his office respected and liked him.

There were no secrets in his life or ugly corners. In his intercourse with other men he was upright and very generous. Beggars spoke well of him. His trade was all untruth, overreaching and cheaterly, and that, of course, was very right.

He sat in his private office this beautiful August afternoon and cast wistful glances at the solemnly ticking clock. It was a Saturday. He hoped to get away by the 2.45, and spend a couple of hours playing with the children before dinner. The children had called after him that morning to remember their half-holiday.

There were four of them waiting for him at

home. He could see their expectant faces at the garden gate—now, as he looked out into the dull droning of the city—he could hear their voices calling out to him to come and play golf-croquet. He had grown too portly for tennis; from his youth up he had detested all games and preferred the multiplication table. He had been one of those boys who incessantly sell and bargain at school. He delighted in playing croquet with his children.

There were four of them, three girls, and the youngest—longed-for, cherished, almost worshipped—was the boy Tommy: Tommykin, Thomas van Crook, Junior, the hope of the family and the firm.

The clerk entered and announced Mr. Loder. A faint smile of scornful satisfaction flickered up in the corners of Thomas van Crook's coarse, rubicund face.

"Show him in," he said pompously, "and send"—with another glance at the clock—"for a cab." Then he called the clerk back. "Is your mother better?" he asked.

"Not much, sir. She continues very weak."

"You must get her some more of that tonic wine. I forget the price. Bring me the bill."

"Thank you, sir. Thank you."

"Mind you bring it receipted."

Mr. Loder was shown in. A tall, spare man, with an intellectual cast of features and seedy clothes; not a man like Thomas, not a man with whom life had gone, or was ever likely to go,

smoothly. Eyes that bore in them uncertainty as regarded God and himself especially and the projects of his fellow-men.

"A beautiful day," said Van Crook, motioning towards a chair. The other acquiesced, sitting down. "I hope it will continue fine." Thomas spoke with importance, as if his wishes on the subject should be taken into consideration. "I like the Sabbath Day to be beautiful, bright and sunshiny. That is as it should be. The—Sabbath—Day. To business men like you and me, Loder, worried with our daily business worries, an—inestimable—boon."

"Yes," replied the other, "yes." And he twirled his hat between his fingers.

"I am going down to my little place in the country presently. Oh, quite a simple, humble little place—a mere cottage. But we are happy there, my wife and I, with the children. Do you get away into the country from Saturday to Monday, Loder?"

"Ah, yes, children!" exclaimed the visitor, and a sudden light flashed despairingly across his eyes, as if he had caught, with his hand, at a fading ray of sunshine. "You have children, Van Crook?"

"Three girls and a boy. You see, I am in rather a hurry. My train goes at 2.45. I have sent for a cab."

"A moment—a moment," said the other, dazed.

"But business, of course, goes before everything else. Is it another contract for——"

"No, by God!" said Loder.

Horror-struck, Thomas van Crook lifted a deprecating hand.

"You mean that one ought not to swear," said Loder. "You are right. One ought not to swear."

The clerk entered, behind the speaker's back, and said the cab was waiting. Thomas van Crook took out his watch, but, to make quite sure:

"Still, I suppose it is a matter of business you have come to speak to me about?" he said, a trifle testily.

"It is."

Van Crook leaned back in his chair and folded his fat arms across his stiff white waistcoat. And again that gleaming, scornful satisfaction appeared about the corners of his face.

The wretched visitor, who had sunk away into his own lap, as it were, made a great effort, bracing himself, bending forward.

"That contract of ours," he gasped. "About the maize! It holds good?"

There was but the faintest note of interrogation about his voice, but Thomas van Crook's eyes became round with astonishment.

"Of course it holds good!" he said.

"Of course it holds good," repeated Loder. He sat staring in front of him, and his lips moved as if he were repeating the words, like an echo, internally.

Van Crook struck his finger-tips impatiently on the desk by his side.

"Fifty thousand!" burst out Loder, suddenly.

"Fifty thousand," repeated, in level tones, Thomas van Crook.

"At five and three-eighths."

"At five and three-eighths," acquiesced the other.

"The price is up to seven and a quarter."

Loder's voice shook; he dropped his hat on the floor.

"So I see." Van Crook rose from his chair. "I fear I must be going."

"Stop a moment—stop!" cried the other, starting up. "That means a loss to me of ninety-three thousand seven hundred and fifty. Stop! Doesn't that work out right? Ninety-three thousand seven hundred and fifty?"

"I suppose so. Yes, yes. I suppose so," Van Crook replied, hastily.

He tried to escape from the hand on his sleeve, as he made for the door. But a lean finger and thumb held on tight to a pinch of black cloth.

"Listen to me. Listen for a moment," persisted Loder. "Ninety-three thousand seven hundred and fifty. Just imagine what it means to me. Realise what it means. Ruin!"

Van Crook turned straight round, with the suddenness of a fierce resolve.

"Are you out of your wits?" he said. "What have you come here for? Are you a business man or a fool?"

"Both," replied Loder.

"Then I am sorry for you. Good-day."

But the unwelcome visitor stood across the doorway.

"You bind me down to this contract?" he persisted. "You expect delivery on Monday next?"

"The man is mad," answered Crook.

"Of course. I expected you to do so. I have not come to ask you to rescind our agreement. I am not mad. All I ask is for a day's delay. Twenty-four hours; that is all. Tuesday, Van Crook; not the day after to-morrow."

There was entreaty in his voice, too much entreaty. The strain of his searching eyes grew intense.

The sharp business man opposite noted this yearning anxiety. A vague importance he could not yet fathom filled the atmosphere of the room. Thomas van Crook walked away to the window. His commercial instincts were afield: he had forgotten about cabs and trains.

"Tuesday. Why Tuesday?" He turned, and said aloud: "You wish to wait till Tuesday. Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"And I cannot comply with your request."

"My God!"

"Really, Mr. Loder, my clerks will hear you. You should abandon this bad habit of swearing."

"I tell you, the delay can do you no harm. To me it is a matter of life and death."

"That you ask for delay in this mysterious

manner is proof sufficient that the advantage would be on your side. Ours is a speculative trade, Loder, as you know. You ask me to behave like an idiot. You would be the first to laugh at me if I were so crazy as to say yes."

"Have you sold?" answered Loder, abruptly. "For Monday?"

"What?" replied Crook, to gain time.

"I ask you, have you sold? I don't believe you have, for I feel sure you are holding on. If you have already sold at present prices, I ask nothing more. I am lost."

There was a moment's silence.

"But it isn't likely!" continued the desperate man passionately. "Our contract is only two days old, and the enormous rise came yesterday and continued this morning. It isn't likely that you should have sold for delivery on Monday!"

"All this is folly!" exclaimed Thomas.

"If you haven't—and I don't believe you have—you can save me without loss to yourself." Loder came forward, pressing upon his adversary. "Swear to me by the blessed Madonna that you have sold, and must deliver on Monday! Swear, and I will go!"

The blessed Madonna was to Thomas not an object of indifference, but of positive disapproval. He was rather shocked to find himself locked up thus in controversy with a Romanist.

"Swear, and I will go!"

"I never swear," replied Thomas. "You have no right, sir, to put these insolent—yes,

insolent—questions! My business concerns me alone, sir!”

“You have not sold; I know it. At least, not for Monday. Then you will let me deliver on Tuesday.”

“I will not.” The words fell like a pistol shot.

“I tell you, if I am obliged to buy on Monday at seven and a quarter, I am hopelessly ruined. The transaction has been an enormous, a desperate speculation; I admit that. It has failed. I have been carried off my feet by this corner; the whole market has been mad, as you know, for a week. I can deliver on Tuesday.”

“Why? Why?” stammered the other, faint with curiosity.

“You have children. I have not come here on my own account. At least, not mainly. I have a wife, a daughter who has been an invalid for years. You are turning them out into the streets, flinging my sick child from her couch into the gutter. I plead for her. I—I plead for her.”

He could say no more, stopping suddenly.

“Why on Tuesday?” reiterated Crook. It was indeed a mad week in the annals of the market, unforgettable, often quoted and discussed to this day. The whole world had gone wild over a corner in Chicago; fabulous quantities, purely speculative, were sold every hour, not at long dates as usual, but for immediate, entirely imaginary, delivery, every man being eager to have fresh quantities, however theoretic, to resell. A fortune came and went with an hour’s

delay. Ten times the possible produce of the year rose and fell in mid-air. If Crook sold to-day he made nearly five thousand pounds, but he had not the slightest intention of selling, convinced that quotations on Monday would indicate a further considerable rise.

"Sell to-day for delivery on Tuesday. That saves me and insures you."

"You know very well I can't in the present insane state of affairs. No man will give me more than twenty-four hours."

"Sell on Monday, then—on Monday!"

The look of suspicion deepened in the other's eye.

"Tell me what you know, or think you know. Say what you mean. At once. Or bring me your receipt on Monday morning."

Then Loder grew suddenly desperate.

"There!" he said, and flung down a paper he had held hidden until now. Van Crook pounced upon it. It was a telegram in cipher.

"Well?" cried Van Crook baffled, infuriated.

"Ah, yes—true." Loder wiped his forehead. "That is a telegram from —." His voice dropped, for he mentioned one of the greatest names over yonder. Van Crook's face assumed an expression of awe. Then of doubt. "What? To you?"

"He bids me do a stroke of business for him, because I am so unnoticeable and unimportant," said Loder bitterly. "Incidentally he proves to me the certainty of a great fall on Tuesday."

"And you show them to me? You have strange ideas of honour."

"Don't speak to me of honour—you!"

"And why not, pray?" Van Crook lifted his pink chin high over his tall white collar.

"Oh, leave me alone," replied the pale man, wearily. "I must save the roof over my wife and child. If I buy on Monday to meet your claim, I am hopelessly lost."

"Then why don't you sell twice the amount on Monday and make a fortune?"

"I can't, as you know very well, since men have begun demanding receipts. I haven't got anything to sell."

Van Crook gave a long, low whistle. Was it possible that this man posed as a speculator and tied himself down to *bona-fide* receipts?

"I have receipts," he said drily. "Surely folks make laws, and wise men elude them."

"The more reason then to have—mercy on me. Sell what you can on Monday, but let me off. I am asking you for an enormous boon; I know it. But it doesn't mean loss to you. Only less gain."

"Less gain is loss to a merchant."

"Well, then, for mercy's sake! For God's!"

But Van Crook had been making rapid computations. The long-expected crash, the final reckoning was coming. In a day or two actual delivery—genuine receipts, that is to say—would be required. Loder's fifty thousand—an immense amount—would be a most important

factor. He believed in the poor fellow's sincerity, but, after all, the telegram was in cipher; speculation remained speculation, even the great man over the sea might be mistaken—there are many slips between the cup and the lip. He had resolved to close that very night with a friend's offer. The friend lived at a summer place not a mile from his own cottage. He would drive over after dinner.

"I have sold," he said calmly.

"You lie!" screamed Loder.

Thomas van Crook had rung the bell.

"You have not the slightest idea what you are saying," he said, pompously. "I must now be going. Sit down and rest a bit. My clerk can get you a glass of water. Good-day."

He walked out of the inner room and closed the door behind him.

"The gentleman in there has asked for some water," he remarked to the clerk. Then, in passing through the office, he paused and spoke with gentle reproof: "It is the 16th to-day, not the 15th," he said. "I have complained to you before on the subject."

So speaking, he tore a leaflet off the clerk's calendar. It was a religious one with texts for every day in the year. A yearly Christmas present from Mrs. Van Crook to the office.

"'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich,'" said Thomas, "'and He addeth no sorrow thereunto.' Ah, true, very true."

"Please, sir, it struck me as so beautiful, I

kept it on an extra day," said the youth, who earned four hundred dollars per annum.

Thomas looked at him keenly, and the young man quailed.

"Never tell untruths," said Thomas severely. Then he went out to the cab, but of course he had missed his train. There was one half an hour later. He sighed. "But it was kind to listen to the poor, stupid wretch," he thought, and felt he had done, as usual, right.

Unconsciously he had retained the little leaflet in his hand, and, in driving along the familiar streets, he unrolled it, with mechanical movement, and smoothed it out. As he gazed down upon the thick black letters, he reflected how true they came in his own existence. His life had been singularly prosperous; all things ran smoothly with his comely, kindly wife, and healthy children, his well-ordered household and comfortable home. There had been one shadow during several years, an unfulfilled desire; they had prayed about it, and the answer had come; a son had been born to them. He threw out his chest and gazed upon the people walking on the pavement. Somebody, an unknown nobody, saluted with a humble sinking of hat and head. Thomas waved a benignant hand.

In the train he found an habitual acquaintance, a man in another line of business than himself, but a member of the same charitable committee. There then was an agreeable community of conversation not too personal. The two began

speaking of a painful case which had applied for relief. Another man whom Thomas knew got in at an intermediate station, to his sub-acid annoyance; for this man was a Revivalist, one of those people who have been converted and ask if you have been saved. And this form of religion was peculiarly objectionable to Thomas.

"A man shouldn't attempt business unless he has business instincts," said the fellow committee member.

"I entirely agree with you," replied Thomas, his thoughts dwelling on Loder; "otherwise, of course, he fails, and then he comes down on the community."

"Now, this man," said his companion, "was a fool."

"All men are who fail," replied Thomas.

The Revivalist turned down his newspaper.

"Surely—surely not," he said.

"Not only fools, but evil-doers," persisted Thomas pugnaciously. "Ill-success is the result of wrong-doing."

"You would not find that easy to prove," said the pious man softly.

For all answer, Thomas pushed a fat finger into a capacious waistcoat pocket, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, and held it under the other's nose. He was delighted at this opportunity of flooring the preacher.

"Behold your proof!"

His antagonist calmly adjusted a pair of gold spectacles, and read the sacred words. Then he

looked at the florid personage opposite to him with an expression of very real pity in his grave, grey eyes.

"And you really think that the riches of the Lord are pounds, shillings and pence?" he said. "Poor man!" Then he resumed his newspaper, hiding behind it.

Thomas Van Crook got out at his station, feeling ruffled and perplexed. He walked at a quick pace, in the beautiful summer sunshine, along a road bordered by flower gardens, under the shadow of the beeches. He was vexed at being later than usual. Tommy would have expected him half an hour ago, and Tommy did not like being put out. The discussion in the train had been objectionable; what absurd ideas came to these people who broke away from "The Word" and went in for emotional religion! And the preceding scene in the office had been worse. The man Loder had made him quite uncomfortable with that outrageous appeal about "an invalid daughter" and "the gutter." Under such circumstances business became impossible. That must be patent to every human being with a head on his shoulders. Fancy allowing all your contracts to turn on personal considerations, selling cheap to a poor man and dear to a richer. Idiotic! There is no doubt it would be. He would drive over to his colleague's that evening, and sell out at seven and a quarter.

The first thing that struck him when he

opened his own gate was that no little feet ran pattering out to greet him. And the next thing was that his wife came into the verandah hurriedly with tear-stains on her face.

She drew him into the sitting-room. "What is it?" A new alarm was upon him, the contact with an unknown emotion suddenly at the throat.

"Never mind, dear; it will be all right. Only"—her voice broke—"Tommy has had some sort of seizure. He is in convulsions. The doctor is with him. I daresay it won't be so very bad."

The father sprang away from her with a cry. In one rush he reached the bedside. A doctor was busy applying useless remedies. The child lay gasping and twitching, oppressed beyond endurance, blue in the face, a terrible sight.

"Good God!" said the father who deemed the words an oath. Then he turned on the doctor, and angrily bade him give relief.

"I am doing what I can," said the man of medicine briefly.

"But it isn't enough."

"It is not. Nature must help herself."

"Nature? Nature? Will she do it?"

"There is no saying. You must not cry out like this. Although the child is not visibly aware of your presence, your agitation is communicating itself to him. I must beg of you to leave this room." The grumpy old doctor did not like Van Crook, who had quarrelled with him about

a bill for parish relief. Van Crook was a hard-working churchwarden, and did his best for the parish and the poor.

"But I can do something. Something more can be done. Just look how the child struggles."

"I am doing what little there is to be done. *You* can do nothing. Well, yes—you are a religious man, are you not? You can pray."

"Is there danger?" The man's voice rose sick with apprehension.

"Pray all you can," replied the doctor.

Van Crook fell more than walked into the adjoining room. Behind the closed door he could hear the gurgling and groaning of the child. "My boy, Thomas," he said, "my boy, Thomas," over and over again. At first he could say or think nothing else. As he stood at the window wildly looking out, he drove his hands into his trousers pockets, and there he struck against the crumpled bit of paper he had angrily thrust out of sight when the pious man returned it to him.

He knew well enough what the little lump was his knuckles pressed against. The letters arose in front of him and wrote themselves large in the sky.

"The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow thereunto."

The Methodist's remark had conveyed no meaning whatever to him. Nor did he now attach any significance to it. But in his practical mind it was evident that, if sorrow—a new

experience—came upon him, something must have gone wrong with the blessing of the Lord.

And the consciousness of the Lord's blessing, His daily approval, was as necessary to him as sunshine to wheat.

He had not believed much in the sick daughter and the gutter, but now, in the light of his own child's illness, the fact stood out painfully glaring. His own child ill, in danger ; none of the children had ever been ill before.

He wanted to pray, but he found that he couldn't. The words stuck in his throat. He was one of those men who can only pray by speaking their petitions out loud. Something had become between him and his prayers.

His wife was in the next room with the doctor and the child. He could hear her. He crept to the door, but the doctor thrust him back. "There is no change," said the doctor.

"Not a little better ?"

"No."

He stood alone in the middle of the silent room. And suddenly a great conception was borne in upon his mind—the possibility of a magnificent compromise, a transaction with the Almighty offering, at any rate, a chance of success. It was a vast speculation, and that tempted him. Nay, as he reflected upon it, he realised that he could make it not a chance, but a certainty. From so noble, so generous an action—unheard of in the annals of commercialism—the Lord could not withhold His blessing, that blessing which

maketh rich, and behold, He addeth no sorrow thereunto.

A life for a life. Loder's invalid daughter against his dying boy.

"I will do it," he said aloud. "Do Thou give me my child. It is a contract. To understand the message. I accept it. Loder's daughter shall live. Let my son live too."

He tottered downstairs to the telephone which communicated with the local telegraph office. And he sent the telegram to Loder. "Consider contract annulled."

He slipped upstairs again easy in mind. His heart was aglow with the munificence of the action he had just committed. And he was certain of his reward. There should be no sorrow mixed up with his wisely-earned blessings. His share of the divine contract he had righteously fulfilled.

At the top of the stairs the doctor met him. "The child is dead," said the doctor.

MISTER BROTHER JONAS

I

IN the favoured borough of Overstad, well known to the student of history, among the fat meadows, a dozen miles beyond Utrecht, there dwell many that are very good, and more that are believed so. Not by themselves—that were a commonplace—but by others of like thinking with themselves. There are also many whose ways are evil, but these belong to the other religious sects.

It is by no means so easy as the careless tourist might imagine to become a person of importance in Overstad. Certain lengths—so to put it—are required of the candidate for social consideration: length of purse, length of pedigree (only local species are known of the family tree) and also length of face. The first two qualifications must occur in conjunction: the last has been known to suffice in itself. A man has achieved greatness in Overstad by never being seen to smile. All three requirements found moderate recognition in the impressive personality of Miss Alida Blom.

It cannot be denied, that Mejuffrouw Alida

Blom belonged on the father's side to the Utrecht family of the Bloms who were cordially hated, as such, by their Overstad namesakes of slightly humbler origin. But her father had married (to the rage of his relations) an Overstad Blom "with a penny in the bank," as he always phrased it, and from the day of his marriage and removal to Overstad his countenance had assumed such an air of unfathomable solemnity, that the townspeople would have respected the daughter for that memory alone. In daily life the worthy man had been a manufacturer of cheap cigars: he had left his only child a fortune amounting to exactly thirteen hundred pounds a year.

Mejuffrouw Alida lived as an uncompromising spinster into stately middle age. She said that marriage was a reproach. St. Paul had intended it to be so, and such it was. From time to time some enterprising suitor made advances: to her honour be it admitted that she always averted his discomfiture, if she could do so. It afforded her no satisfaction, she averred, to see the poor male creatures shrivel up and slink away.

She inhabited a dull, white house—as white as it was dull—with green shutters, on a dead, grass-eaten square, which bore grimly the name of the Old Churchyard. In front of Number Nineteen the bit of pavement was kept properly weeded. Everything was kept in proper condition at Number Nineteen. Even the man who came and did odd jobs (not "odd:" there was never any variety) was a white-haired old

widower, who had promised not to marry again.

Once only there had been an actual flutter in this rectilinear household—it happened when the old man had fallen ill and sent a chubby, curly, young nephew to fill his place. Miss Alida, retiring from her first interview with the newcomer, had remarked to Elizabeth, the cook, that the lad was of a pleasing exterior—a remark, frequently revived, amid head-shakings, by the two maids, who had both spent more than twenty-five years in the house. In the second interview Miss Alida had dismissed the youth from her premises with contumely, for making love, over the palings, to the nurse-girl next door.

Thirteen hundred a year is a fortune in Miss Alida's small Overstad circle. In itself it would entitle its owner to respect: it becomes a source of persistent adulation, when much of it is found to be available for charity. Miss Alida's own requirements were simple and solid: she was eager to share her bread and butter with the poor.

"A most praiseworthy attitude of mind," said the minister of the Free Reformed Church, to which Miss Alida belonged. For, alas, she was a dissenter, even from the dissenters. The arrangement was her father's—he having always shaken his head whenever anybody expressed a religious opinion of any kind.

"But who, pray, is Miss Alida Blom?" questioned the minister's brother, a missionary,

recently returned from the West Indies, and appointed to the management of a mission-school at home.

"The most estimable member of my community," replied the minister, "and the wealthiest. How beautiful," he added, "to find the two thus combined!" The minister was lanky, cadaverous, attired in an ever-dusty black coat. He had eleven children: his locks, his speech and his skin were oleaginous: his nails were blacker than his coat. He was a false shepherd: of that uncommon species you could not have found an unpleasanter specimen in all the country round.

Unless it might have been his brother, freshly imported, a dark presence, discoloured by tropical suns, with a look from which dogs shrank away.

"Unmarried, I think I understand?" continued the missionary. "Mejuffrouw" may apply to spinster, widow or wife.

"Unmarried, I am thankful to say," replied Matthew, the minister. "For the married women centre their affections on their households, the unmarried——"

"On their minister," sneered Timothy, the missionary, himself a bachelor.

The elder brother smiled. "For shame! On their church. Miss Alida is worth several thousand florins a year to me in my care for the needs of my—poor."

"Lucky man—poor, I mean," said Timothy.

"Some few droppings fall on me. I do not deny that. When Susan had the measles last September, and Timothy, your godson, caught——"

"I remember," replied the missionary hastily. "How old is your Miss Alida?"

"Miss Alida completed her forty-seventh year on the thirteenth of November last. But her health is excellent, and she is also remarkably well—ahem!—preserved."

"A fine woman?" The questioner's voice betrayed interest. The older man cast a long, leering glance at him.

"No. Veracity compels me to confess that she is unusually plain."

"Well, one can't have everything," said Timothy.

He took a few puffs at his long Gouda pipe before he added: "By your own account she is generous, kind-hearted."

"When not in her tantrums," replied the wary Matthew. "Her generosity is largely a matter of whim."

Timothy's eyes wandered round his brother's shabby box of a study. The stamping and howling of children could be heard in a continual storm round the poor little house. "I should like," said Timothy, "to meet this Miss Alida."

"I fear that would be difficult to manage," retorted Matthew. In the momentary silence that followed a declaration of war passed between the brothers.

"Do you think so? I shall call on her and ask for a subscription."

"She don't care for missions. She don't believe in 'em. I have frequently laboured in vain to procure a donation for you, Timothy."

"You mean," said Timothy, smiling his most unpleasant smile, "that you look upon Miss Alida as your especial preserve?"

"The expression is disgusting. But, if you choose to put it so, well, yes."

"My dear Matthew, there is always a certain charm in poaching."

"A man's enemies," said the minister, folding his hands, "shall be those of his own house." Probably he would have added even more pungent quotations, for the red spots were coming out upon his bilious complexion, but all further discussion was prevented by loud knockings and parleyings at the door. In another moment Miss Alida, greatly flurried, stood screaming at the obsequious pastor.

"Minister, come with me at once!" cried Miss Alida. "Who's this? Never mind. Come along with me at once!" She caught him by the arm and propelled him along the passage. Hatless, in his filthy dressing-gown and slippers, vainly expostulating, he found himself seated in a cab, driving furiously along the most frequented street of Overstad—worst of all, opposite sat his brother, serene, in glossy black.

"Present me, my dear Matthew," said Timothy.

"It seems to me it was *I* Miss Alida asked to accompany her," came the savage reply.

Timothy took off his shiny tall hat and gently stroked it. "Should the services of a clergyman be suddenly called for, I felt that my costume——" He sank his emotionless eyes down the flabby dilapidation beside him, in tattered purple hangings, torn slippers, worse socks.

"Are you a parson also? Oh, ay, Timothy, I suppose? So much the better," said Miss Alida. Already the cab dashed round a corner of the Churchyard. Miss Alida hurried the two clerics through her own front-door and straight down into her kitchen.

"Such doings in a Christian woman's house?" gasped Miss Alida.

In the middle of the kitchen, by the table, sat the cook. On the table lay, prominently placed, the cook's arm, and that arm had been, recently, badly burnt. Over the injured member leant a gaunt figure in a white mob cap, which figure and cap belonged to an itinerant saleswoman, from whom Miss Alida occasionally bought fruit.

"Oh, oh, oh!" groaned the cook.

The old woman, with a countenance of preternatural solemnity, entirely oblivious of any change in her surroundings, continued her movements and mutterings.

"Hocus pocus! Sanctus Maria!—ter-ter-ter!" she murmured, and flung three great sweeps of the cross high in air, above the cook

and the table and, almost, over Miss Alida. The latter leaped back.

"Spirit evil—spirit devil—spirit holy——" declaimed the old woman.

"Peace!" shrieked Miss Alida. "Stop her, parson! Cook, if you don't take that arm away, I give you notice on the spot. Yes, though you have been twenty years in my family, and I never thought——"

"Twenty-five come next February: the pain's going down," said the cook.

"Really, really, this is very reprehensible," began Matthew, who was hunting for one of his slippers that had come off in the hurried descent.

"Prehensible?" cried Alida. "Of the devil! This woman, I now understand too late, is a Papist, a horrible, iniquitous Papist, of whom *I* have bought gooseberries! Heaven forgive me for buying gooseberries of a Papist. And such bad ones too! I might have guessed. By their fruit ye shall know them, as the blessed Bible says."

"My gooseberries——" began the old woman, turning hastily,—but she checked herself and reverted to her exorcisms.

"Out of my house you go this minute!" shouted the indignant spinster, hoarse with passion, "and never dare to enter it again!"

"Out of my house you go this minute!" repeated Matthew, trying to look under the dresser, "and never dare to enter it again!"

The old woman had taken up a basin of water

and began plashing the contents over the wounded limb. The patient screamed.

"Hocus pocus—Ter est sanctus——"

Timothy stepped quietly forward, gripped the old woman by the shoulders and hoisted her, with merciless persistence, to the door.

"Out you go, swindler!" cried Miss Alida.

"Out, you witch!"

On the threshold, however, the old woman wrenched herself round and, before disappearing:

"In the name of the Holy Virgin thou blasphemest," she said, solemnly cranking one crooked finger forwards, "the black death shall eat thy vitals! Tris! Anathema. Ter. Ter. Ter." Rather suddenly she disappeared around the corner, by an extra-forcible jerk of Timothy's.

"Oh, oh, oh! The pain was ever so much better!" wailed the cook. "She kills and she cures as she pleases. She says so herself, and it's true. 'I cures and I kills, whom I wills,' she says."

"Elizabeth, you are a heathen," replied Miss Alida, rather pale. "Worse than a heathen. I will send you down some of my linseed liniment, by Suzan. It is excellent for burns."

"Not as good as Vrouw Dupper," boldly answered the cook.

"Folly!"

"You wait till you're burnt," said the cook.

"Dear, dear, how she did curse missus! It gave me quite a turn," added Suzan.

"Peace!" said Alida, her nose high in air.

II

Next morning, at an early hour, Miss Alida's grey-headed servitor again summoned the minister to his mistress's side.

"She's that bad!" said the old factotum, at the street-door.

"How bad!" cried the minister's dishevelled wife from the top of the staircase.

"As bad as can be," replied Peter.

A thrill of expectancy ran through the little house.

"Dear, dear me!" exclaimed Matthew, running about in a not unusual flutter. "Supposing that something were to happen! I hope not, Sophia!"

"I hope not," echoed the weary Sophia, turning to look for her latest baby but one.

"The dealings of Providence are inscrutable," declared Matthew, from habit. "And I'm not at all sure we're in her will," he added, as he hurried downstairs.

Nevertheless he was very much annoyed to find, on arriving, Timothy already tranquilly installed in Miss Alida's red-velvet parlour.

"Did she send for you too?" asked Timothy, with his thin smile. "The doctor is with the dear patient."

"You are sitting in Miss Alida's own chair," retorted the minister snappishly. "Nobody ever sits in it but she."

"Indeed? Well, at any rate, she can't sit in it now," answered Timothy.

An angry silence ensued. "Perhaps," added Timothy sweetly, "she may never sit in it again."

Matthew bounded. "Good gracious, I hope she won't die!" he cried. "I couldn't afford to lose her. The children——"

"You idiot, do you mean to say you have had her all this time, and haven't even got into her will?"

Matthew scowled at his brother. "You try," he said.

"You *have* tried then?"

"Lord! Timothy, if I'm an idiot, what are you?"

"Not an idiot, as you shall see. Here comes the doctor."

A young man, with a healthy, jolly face, redolent of health, walked, grinning, into the room.

"Well?" demanded both brothers, starting up.

The doctor looked from one anxious inquirer to the other. He read their faces like an open book, and his own grew immoderately long.

"Very bad," he croaked.

"You don't mean to say she's dying?" squealed Timothy.

The young man steadied the corners of his mouth.

"In cases like hers," he said, "all prophecy is vain. She *may* live for twenty years longer. She *may* die to-night."

"What, pray, is her disease?" queried Timothy's grave voice.

The doctor looked this strange speaker more

carefully in the eyes. "*That*," he answered slowly, "a physician cannot say. Now, mind you cheer her up, or you'll kill her at once." He lifted his hat off a chair and departed. To his wife he confided a different account. "Her disease was a surfeit of gooseberries," he said. "Over-eating won't hurt her : she's hard as nails. I couldn't resist the pleasure of giving that old blood-sucker a fright."

Alarmed, indeed,—greatly disconcerted—the parson sat by Miss Alida's bedside. The missionary also was established there, apparently cool. The latter's gaze seemed unconsciously fascinated by the scarlet bow on the invalid's peaked cap.

"The curse is coming true!" said Alida in sepulchral tones. "The hand of death is heavy upon me. It is my punishment for having dealings with the woman that was drunk——"

"I didn't notice that," murmured Matthew reassuringly.

"With the blood of the saints," continued Alida, frowning. "It griped where she said it would. And I'm going to die."

"No, no," sobbed Matthew.

"So I've sent for you two holy men to consult about my will."

"Yes," exclaimed both brothers, sitting up with alacrity. "It isn't made already?" added Matthew.

She eyed him sharply. "No. Why should it be?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Oh yes: in the

hour of death we are in life, you know. I mean, in the hour of——”

“Never mind what you mean,” interrupted the spinster nervously. “I haven’t got any relations I care about. If I make a good will, I daresay I shall get better. Yes, that is quite my idea. Now, whom should I leave all my money to?”

“A difficult question!” said Matthew, rolling up his eyes.

“Or, rather, I should say ‘what?’ for of course I shall leave it to a charity.”

“An admirable destination!” said Timothy, rolling up his, which were much more expressive than his brother’s.

Miss Alida gave a sudden howl. “Cure me one of you,” she said, “the piousest, cure me!”

Both gentlemen in black—the glossy and the rusty—stared, out of countenance.

“You don’t mean to tell me,” cried Miss Alida, with vehemence, “that a poor Papist creature—and she a twopenny halfpenny beggar who sells fruit—can let the devil loose inside a good Christian gentlewoman and two parsons in orders can’t work him out again? Exercise me, or whatever you call it, exercise me at once!”

“’Tis the gooseberries,” said Matthew. “Calm yourself, dear sister! When these have exhausted their violence——”

Miss Alida’s face grew purple. “You accuse me,” she cried, “of over-eating! Me, the most temperate of women! Now, if *I* were a parson——”

"I will cure you!" said Timothy. He had risen. He laid a solemn hand on Miss Alida's cap. He winked at Matthew, and Matthew looked so furious, that the younger brother burst into a guffaw.

"What's that?" exclaimed Alida, dodging under the hand.

"My troublesome bronchitis," coughed Timothy. "Chronic. Caught in the vineyard."

"Intemperance?"

"No, no. Fie, dear sister. Silence. I will cure you. This evening, at sunset, you will be well."

"How do you know?"

"I know. Thou knowest. He knows." Timothy pointed majestically to Matthew.

"We know. You know. They know," rejoined the latter scornfully.

"I'll make my will to-morrow," exclaimed Alida, "but I can't bequeath my property to missions, because I don't believe in them."

"Many of the societies are indeed not trustworthy," admitted Timothy. "The best plan would be to leave it to an absolutely reliable missionary to distribute as he may think expedient." Matthew actually howled.

"Rubbish," replied Alida. "I've never seen a single black man turned white."

Timothy bit an angry lip. "You have seen little, then," he said with spirit, "of the good work."

"Show me a converted nigger! Show me one!" cried Alida.

"I haven't got one in my pocket," retorted Timothy.

"But, perhaps, you have in a cupboard at home?" suggested Matthew, enjoying his brother's discomfiture.

"Yes, by George!" cried Timothy, his big eyes ablaze.

"What a very improper expression!" said Miss Alida. "Then, bring him me to-morrow and, if I am well again, I'll make a will and leave him all my money. Yes, you shall have my money for your missions. Else, I'll give it, for soup-kitchens, to Matthew."

"I'll bring you one to-night," cried Timothy desperately.

"La, there's no such thing!" said Miss Alida, closing her eyes. "Nor never could be," she added. "Soup-kitchens is sense. As for Surinam, it's rubbish. I don't believe there's no such place as Surinam."

III

"Oh, leave me in peace, you canting humbug!" exclaimed the younger brother to his exasperating companion, in the street. He shook off the other's sneers and reproaches, and turned a corner, by himself.

"Get a Christian nigger by to-morrow, or the money's mine!"—the minister's jeering voice called after him.

"I will," muttered Timothy between his teeth.

He had promised readily, sure of some possible device. He would dress up and blacken one of his pupils at the Mission-House. But, seen closer, the plan appeared too risky. He was bound to get found out. Even if the young man kept silence (an unreasonable assumption), he would not be able to act, or look, the part.

Timothy's courage gave way to despondency. Success seemed impossible. He wandered gloomily along the principal thoroughfares of Overstad. Suddenly a gaudy poster, on a hoarding, caught his eye. It was the advertisement, not new, of a well-known Amsterdam Music Hall.

The missionary jumped. A copper-coloured "Jubilee" grinned at him from the yellow background. The good man—the black-coated, not the black-skinned—rushed, skipped, ran to the telegraph office.

Four hours later the Reverend Timothy welcomed Mr. Jonas Washington Bangs at the Overstad Railway Station.

"Sir," said Mr. Bangs, "I have come. But I must be back, sir, at ten to-night, to sing at the 'Variety.'"

"We can manage that," replied the Reverend Timothy. "To tell you the truth, I want you to come here to-morrow morning."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the coloured gentleman, who spoke unadulterated American. "To-morrow, sir, I start for Paris. A better engagement, sir. Splendiferous."

"Then come with me immediately," cried

Timothy. He instructed Mr. Jonas, as they went along, in the rôle which was required of him and found his grinning pupil as apt as he could desire. There was a little momentary difficulty about terms, Mr. Jonas demanding two pounds instead of one. "I always negotiate in pounds," said Mr. Jonas. Ultimately the difference was split, on condition of Mr. Jonas exchanging his flaring red cravat for a black bow, and removing a huge coloured-glass breast-pin and studs. On this subject the negro gentleman expressed strong personal feeling: the little tie he especially described as "outrageous," and indeed the effect was not satisfactory, for his waistcoat remained a double-breasted, brass-buttoned chess-board and his pantaloons shimmered like a polished pewter pot.

But Timothy lent him a pair of black-kid gloves, and led him to the Old Churchyard.

"I must see Miss Alida at once—at once," he said to Suzan.

Miss Alida sent back to say she was far too ill. The nigger grinned.

"Tell her," persisted Timothy importantly, "I am here *with*—Surinam!"

Suzan, who looked thoroughly scared, retired precipitately.

"La, how interesting! And I said there was no such place!" cried Miss Alida, and ran out at once into the hall.

She made the two gentlemen welcome, ushering them in, with many salaams. But she fought

a little shy of the nigger, who visibly impressed her, and of whose conversation she could not understand a word.

"Sit down," she said, "I beg of you." And she had in some very good Madeira, of which both visitors freely partook.

"So this," she said, "is really a native Christian?"

"It is indeed," replied Timothy, sighing contentedly. He folded his arms and gazed with benevolence at the native Christian, in the little black tie, sipping Madeira.

Miss Alida said "La!" Then she requested the Reverend Timothy to inquire of the convert if there were many such as he.

"Forty thousand," came the ready information.

"Now is that really true?" queried the sceptical spinster.

"He under-estimates the number," replied Timothy.

Miss Alida said "La!" Then she inquired the negro gentleman's name.

"Jonas. Brother Jonas."

"That, of course, was the Christian name they had given him. But what was his original heathen appellation?" Miss Alida evinced great interest.

"Borrioboola Gha," said Timothy. Miss Alida ventured to remark that she found this much finer than "Jonas."

"He was a great chief in his own country," said Timothy. These words he translated to Jonas—"Great chief—eh?"

"Great chief," assented Mr. Washington Bangs.

"A very important conversion. Far-reaching political consequences. A whole tract of country, twice the size of Holland, opened up to the missionaries," exclaimed Timothy.

"I'm ashamed of my unbelief," said Miss Alida. "Will the Prince have some more Madeira? Madeira, Prince?"

"Madeira, very good," said the Prince.

"You mustn't call him that. He isn't a Prince," interposed Timothy, who was growing fearsome of his own success. "Brother Jonas! Brother Jonas, eh?" The nigger showed all his teeth. "What beauties!" thought Miss Alida, who had never, outside picture-books, seen a Non-European before.

"He is very handsome, I think," remarked Miss Alida, and Timothy realised, with scorn, that his specimen was, physically, a fine one.

"It's his mind that is beautiful," said Timothy. "All clean and white now and pure. What matter if his skin be black?"

"It is a rich copper-colour," retorted Miss Alida, "like my pudding-shapes,—at least when Elizabeth cleans them properly. And I much prefer it to a mealy-complexion."

"Like Matthew's," said the mean missionary.

"Or yours," came the answer, quick as a shot. "Yours is painted, but his is natural."

"Brute," thought the missionary. However, he only said: "Well, now, you've seen there *are*

native converts I hope you're convinced? We must be going. I'll come back to-morrow morning."

"Do," replied Miss Alida. "I'm sorry you're in such a hurry. Back to your work, I suppose? How beautiful! But you can leave this dark gentleman here a bit. I should like to show him to Elizabeth and Suzan. I've never seen such an interesting creature before, in all my life."

Timothy objected, a little too eagerly, for Miss Alida, like most affluent old ladies, insisted on getting her own way as soon as she found it crossed. In the end she simply ordered the missionary out of her presence, and resumed her seat, face to face with the interesting stranger.

"I shall keep him to dinner," she said. "Eaty! Eaty!" and she motioned with her fingers to her mouth.

"Eaty—good," replied Jonas, mindful of the Madeira.

"I shall return to-morrow morning. Remember your promise," said Timothy, lingering, discomfited, in the doorway.

"I keep my promises," answered Alida sharply. "You can come back this evening and take him away."

When she found herself alone with this unintelligible foreigner, Miss Alida's excitement and delight knew no bounds. In her dull, daily existence so marvellous an event upset all her ideas of regularity. She felt somebody else, happier and lighter. She was yearning to prove

her intimacy with the converted prince to all the fusty old fogies of Overstad.

Meanwhile, she treated her two maids to a sight of him. Both exhibited the same symptoms of delighted alarm as their mistress. The old man said crossly, he believed he was painted brown.

Miss Alida left the door ajar, with an eye to "the conventions." She found it rather weary work, after a time, sitting opposite her prince, nodding and smiling. But she liked to see him grin back, with a gleam of his ivory teeth. Also she liked to see him enjoy his dinner, which he certainly did.

"Goody—goody—eaty—eaty," he repeated, shovelling down his food.

"They should teach them how to eat," thought Miss Alida, and she wondered, with exquisite thrills of uncertainty, whether her guest, in his wicked days, had eaten his foes.

Dinner was over, and both hostess and guest were feeling friendly with all things and especially to each other, when Suzan communicated to her mistress the old man's shameful suggestion of "paint." Miss Alida grew purple with anger. She stretched out her hand timidly, and drew it back again. The nigger watched her.

"Mister—Brother—Jonas," said Alida. He nodded. She repeated it once or twice, softly, and, gaining courage, she made a dash at the convert's brown hand and vigorously rubbed its back. "It doesn't come off!" she cried indignantly.

"Go, Suzan, and tell him to hold his slanderous tongue!"

"Goody—goody," said Mr. Washington Bangs, without moving his hand.

Miss Alida blushed very red, and went and sat farther off. Then the nigger did something to make himself agreeable. Miss Alida, who had never heard Jubilee songs—or any music outside her hideous chapel-singing—listened in a tumult of ecstasy beyond words:

"Some say that John the Baptist
Was nothing but a Jew,
But the Holy Bible tells us
He was a preacher too."

"Oh, Mister—Brother Jonas!" gasped the spinster, "Oh, Mister—Brother Jonas!" The man had a good tenor voice and he sang with exaggeration of feeling—all the nervous passion of his excitable race. Miss Alida's simple soul was moved to its deepest depths.

"Why did they sell my Dinah?
Upon my wedding-day."

Miss Alida could not, of course, understand the words, but she drank in the liquid roll of the music, the accents, the eyes of the singer. She was flooded with deliciousness: she melted in tender tears.

"Oh lub'ly maid, I lub' you so!
I lub' you! Oh!"

The singer stopped singing and looked at his watch.

"Oh, Mister Brother Jonas!" sobbed Miss Alida.

When Timothy was ushered into the room ten minutes later he found Miss Alida Blom and the Christian convert sitting side by side on the sofa. The Christian convert had on his scarlet tie, and all his jewellery blazed all over him.

"This is how I keep my promise," said Miss Alida coyly, and she put her arm round Washington's neck.

Timothy started back: then he burst out: "That man's an American nigger, the son of a slave."

"A Christian convert," said Alida.

"Christian fiddlesticks! He's a singer in a music-hall!"

"Borrioboola Gha," said Alida, softly stroking the brown hand in her own.

"And his name is Bangs!"

"Mine is Blom—for the present," answered Alida, rising. "You—*you* are an impostor!" she cried, "Leave this house! If what you say were true—which it's not—you'd certainly have lost your wager! Show me another convert—a better—if you can!"

"I can't," whispered Timothy, creeping to the door, crest-fallen. Alida turned to the gentleman on the sofa. "Dear Mister Brother Jonas!" she cried, "If only I could understand what you say!"

"Sing, sing—thirsty," said the convert, "Madeira very good."

ALL MY STORY

IT happened many years ago. But it is all my story. I know that many years must have elapsed, because I was a young man at the time. And now I'm middle-aged. When one's life is just the same, day after day, year after year, one loses count of time. Still, my blood flowed faster in those days : I don't think I should do it now. And I'm bald. And—and Sarah's hair's got a deal of grey in it.

When I came to this town from the country, my lot was an uninteresting one : it has always been that. I was an orphan : I had been brought up in a small asylum, as a youth I had been set to do the writing connected with the place. For from childhood I have written a beautiful hand, equal, tidy, like copper-plate. And I can do sums. I have never been good at anything else.

I was twenty-one, when the old lady died whose beneficence had supported our institution. She was the only protectress or sort of parent I had ever had—too far above me to be anything like a real mother, but animated by the best intentions. "My dears," she would say, very grand in her silks and furs, "always remember that I love you as if you were my own children,

and not common children at all." When she died, they closed the institution, and I was turned adrift. No, it is hardly fair to say that. Her nephew, who inherited all her property, got me my present situation in this town—dear me, that was thirty-four years ago—as clerk to old Abrams, the money-lender. Old Abrams is dead: I am with his son.

So I came up to the town, a young fellow of twenty-two, that had never been away from a country orphanage. Needless to say, I was terribly forlorn and miserable. Ah, how lonely I was! What fools young people are to care about being lonely! And old people too! If you come to reason it out—but no, it's no use reasoning. I have not got accustomed to being lonely yet.

Still, I shall never forget that first evening in my new town lodging. 'Tis the same lodging to-day: I have nothing to say against the room: it is airy, and from the window you can see the tops of trees. They belong to the cemetery. But Widow Both, my landlady—she has been dead these last ten years—was taciturn and, when she spoke, cantankerous. Nobody can deny that: her daughter has a touch of her temper, but, then, the daughter suffers from asthma, and is deformed. They were not the sort of people, certainly, to cheer a lonesome lad, nor did they make any attempt to do so. I do not think that I shed actual tears that first night. I hope not. But, undoubtedly, I was

very miserable, more miserable, on the whole, than I have ever been since.

I got up from a restless bed next morning and, with a beating heart, I went to my new situation. Dear me, I waited in the little ante-room for a few minutes till my master came in. How many people have I seen wait there since, whose hearts must have beat worse than mine ! I must say hard things of Isaac Abrams, though he be dead, and, in fact, why should I spare him ? He was a usurious landlord and money-lender, a scoundrel that lived by exploiting human wickedness and folly and innocence. "There's no fool like a good fool," that was a favourite axiom of his. On the very first day I saw what a blackguard he was, and I loathed the whole business. Yet there was nothing really criminal in it, nothing even absolutely wrong, if you come to analyse each separate transaction. If fools want money why should wiser men not lend it them ? *I* was a fool to object to a reasonable and lucrative form of business. Lucrative to others. I earned forty pounds a year : I now earn seventy-five. Soon I even got to enjoy, the while I loathed, the work. The old man's cunning and cleverness were a constant delight to me. The son has neither, but now I help the son.

That first day, however, I felt doubly melancholy : I was heartily glad when the hour of deliverance struck, and I could leave the dingy desk, the dingy office, the dingy papers, and get out into the open air. Not the "fresh" air, as

we country people understand it. Though I don't miss that now, I have taken an occasional holiday in the country: I am not sorry, on the whole, to get back to my work.

I had purposely got a room at some slight distance from the office. The walk of about half-a-mile used always to take me ten minutes. Of late it has got to be eleven, I could not say why. For a man isn't old—surely—at fifty-six!

The walk isn't much to boast of—through the mean back streets of a second-rate town. You can easily picture it to yourself: the tall houses on either side—they get lower later on, but many of them are tenements—with flower-pots and dirty rags in the windows, the narrow roadway between, with costers' carts, and organs, and dancing children, the dull strip of sky above, a watery grey, or a sultry blue. That first afternoon—I went back at five—the streets seemed more sordidly ugly than I ever have thought them since. Perhaps because the July day was so hot and glorious. Perhaps because no one knew me of all this jostling crowd. In our village, the night before last, with all the sweet smells and shadows upon the shining earth, it had been "Good evening, Mr. Spannet!" from mouth to mouth, from door to door. God! in this cheerless life of mine—oh, but that is wrong: I have had my share of blessings—there never has been a gloomier night than that brilliant July Thursday along the very streets I have walked this afternoon.

I walked, then, that bright evening on my own sad thoughts intent. I fear that I hung my head. But I had to lift it at the corners to make sure of my unaccustomed road. And it was at the corner of—no, I dare not mention the name of the street even now—it was there the great thing happened which began the whole wonderful story—pooh, how absurd it sounds—the old man looked up from his cobbling, and gazed at me for one instant and nodded; that was all.

He was sitting in front of his poor little house, on a straw-bottomed chair: he was cobbling. A little way off some children were playing battledore and shuttle-cock. He was an old man with a worn, kind-tempered face. He nodded "good evening"; that was all.

I nodded back and passed on. But I fancy my step was a great deal lighter: I know that my heart was. I had found, somehow, a friend. The world, after all, is not so lonely a place as it seems.

I thought of the old cobbler frequently in the evening: I slept better that night. The office and its master of course engrossed my interest, but every now and then would come the vague recollection of something pleasant, and when I reflected what it might be, it was the cobbler.

Next morning I looked forward with some anxiety to meeting him again. Would he be at the street-corner? I wondered. As I approached the spot, I could hardly restrain my curiosity.

I hurried on till I could get a sight of it—he was sitting there; in another moment I was beside him, expectant—doubtless last night's coincidence would not again repeat itself, he had taken me, doubtless, for some other—I laughed at myself for my foolishness, he looked up and nodded me a solemn "good morning." I nodded back and passed on. Not till then did I realise how much I should have missed my new friend's recognition! How ridiculous it seems, how important! in my ridiculously unimportant life. I am sure I worked more cheerfully that second day, although Abrams now showed himself in his full temper, an abusive evil-thinking old man.

And the cobbler's morning and evening salute—oh, laugh if you like!—became the constant pleasure of my life. Yes, of course I had other pleasures, not many. I suppose I am a dull man, and might have done other things or done things different. I suppose I might have looked out for another situation than the one which had been found for me. Such an idea never entered into my head: I should have thought it black ingratitude to my honoured benefactor. Some men take life as they're told to. On the whole I did very well, earning my bread and butter, eating it quietly in my room. I had a nervous horror of dismissal, want of employment, poverty, pauperism. The cobbler and I, we always nodded to each other, solemnly, without exchanging a word. All summer he would sit outside, he

went indoors on the first of October and took his place behind a cracked widow-pane. I have never known it otherwise than cracked.

So my life went on for seventeen years, a long time, if you come to think of it, but not unless you do. A long time in which nothing happens, though it may pass very slowly, is very quickly past. My daily work was monotonously regular, but then so was my weekly pay. Both slowly increased, as the business flourished. I cannot say I was satisfied with my lot, nor yet was I dissatisfied. The best thing, I always fancy, is to take life exactly as it comes, not weighing pros or cons. I was interested, during those young days, in Abrams' daughter Sarah, but that is neither here nor there. To-day she has seven children, a frowsy grey fringe, and no waist.

The cobbler slipped on through life, unperceived, from about sixty years of age to very near eighty. Morning and evening, we never missed our salute. Sometimes he would smile, but very rarely. I used to wait for his smile: it did not come more than once a month. I had got to call him "Amos" in my own mind, for no reason, but that I thought the name would suit him, and I invented endless stories about his possible career, as I walked along the streets. In reality I knew nothing. There were plenty of people about the house he lived in: I could not trace any connection between him and them. During those earlier years he was not as prominent in my life

as I have made him afterwards. I had my own interests at the office and at home. I had made a few friends. He was just—in the daily walk to my business—the old man at the corner who nodded “Good-day.”

Yet, when he was absent from his place one summer morning, my heart stood still. Somehow I had never realised the possibility of this: of course he must be ill. Before I knew what I was doing, I had turned into the house, had pushed open the door which leads to the room where the cracked window is, and stood looking in.

The old man sat by the table, his face resting on his hands—a paper lay before him.

“What is the matter?” I said aloud. “Can I help?” It seemed incredible that, after these seventeen years, I should actually be speaking to “Amos.”

He looked up with a start. “Ah, good morning!” he said. “Is it you? Thank you. No.” There was such misery in his face and voice that I could not pass on.

“What is it?” I said. “Tell me. We are almost old friends.”

He smiled in spite of himself. “You cannot help me,” he answered bitterly. “Nobody can: it’s too late. What do such fools as we with such sharks as money-lenders?”

I pricked up my ears. “I—I know a good deal about money-lending,” I said. “I—I have friends in the business. Is that paper a bond? If anyone can do anything for you, I can.”

"'Tis a bad business; you should have no friends in it," he said: but he held out the paper, and the first thing I saw was that it was in my own hand-writing.

It was a bond from a certain James Ranklin, one of Abrams' rascally transactions. Rascally? Well, really, it all depends. The man, a green-grocer, had got a loan of two hundred and fifty pounds, on condition that if he did not return the money, with ten per cent. interest, on or before the twenty-second of July, his whole business should become the property of the money-lender. I put down the paper. The twenty-second was that very day.

"'Tis my daughter's husband," said the cobbler. "The silly things only ventured to tell me this morning. They'd been putting it off from day to day. There's the seven of them, father, mother and five children, turned out on to the streets to-night."

I hesitated, not knowing what to suggest.

"And the thing not even inevitable!" he continued. "I could have got them the two hundred and fifty pounds,—I could just about have got them that—but not in half a day!"

"You could!" I stammered.

"Ay, I could: I've got about that in the world, but I'd need twenty-four hours to get at it."

"The deed leaves you till six to-night."

"'Tis no use. The cowardly simpletons. And the business worth eight hundred pounds if 'tis worth a penny!"

"Your name isn't Amos?" I said abruptly.

He glanced up, annoyed. "My name's Thomas Ruff," he answered. "What of that?"

"I'm glad to know," I responded, "Mr. Ruff, —'tis your daughter, you say?"

"Ay, my only daughter, as good a girl as ever stepped. And James is good enough, though a trifle timid. And the children,—dear sweet children"—he broke off with something like a smothered oath. "That such blackguards should be allowed to exist," he said. "Would that I had the killing of the man who drew up that deed!" He pointed to my paper on the table.

"Mr. Ruff, did I understand you to say you could have that money to-night?"

"To-morrow morning, at the earliest."

"But to-morrow, you are *sure*, you could have the whole amount?"

"Certain sure."

"Thomas Ruff, will you let me look at that paper again?"

He handed it across; I took it leisurely, looked over it, and tore it in two.

"What on earth are you doing?" he exclaimed.

"You are mistaken," I calmly answered, "The date is the twenty-third. You have till to-morrow night."

"What folly is this? Here, give me those scraps! Are you mad?"

"Get your money," I replied, burying the fragments in my trousers' pocket. "You have time till to-morrow. It will not be called for till

to-morrow at six. Then, mind that your son-in-law has it. The money and ten per cent. interest. The less any of you talk about it the better. Don't say a word, but promise the money. Good-day."

I left the house and, hurrying to the office, got the same bond re-written, with the altered date, and replaced amongst the others before my master came in. Of course I tore up the original deed, as I had torn up Amos's duplicate.

Presently, while Abrams was arranging his business for the day :

"There's a loan falls due this afternoon," he said. "A good speculation, I fancy; I don't think the fellow can pay," and he rubbed his hands softly.

"Which is it?" I asked, going across to the cupboard, where these things were kept.

"Name of Ranklin," replied old Isaac. "James Ranklin, greengrocer."

I got out my new copy and looked over it. "To-morrow," I said coolly, going back to my desk.

"Hey, what?" exclaimed Isaac.

"The bill isn't due till to-morrow," I answered, writing away.

Old Isaac produced his little black pocket-book. "I've got it down the twenty-second," he said.

"You've made a mistake," I answered, dipping my pen into the ink. "It's down the twenty-third in the bond."

He went across and had a look, pishing and

pshawing a little, for he didn't like making mistakes.

"After all, it doesn't matter a bit," he said; "only, 'tis awkward: you'll have to go for the money. I have to travel to-morrow to that sale."

"Yes, I remember," I said. "It doesn't matter, I can go."

"I don't like you to. It's not the sort of work for you. You bungle it. You're too soft-hearted. You're only good at desk-work."

"I know you think so, sir, but I'll do my best."

That evening the cobbler was missing from his doorstep, and next morning, in my nervousness, I went a roundabout.

My employer was absent all day as I knew he would be: at six I got my hat, and went across to the street where Ranklin lived.

As soon as the man came into the shop I recognised him and he me.

"Walk inside," he said.

In the back-parlour were Thomas, his comely daughter, and a couple of fair-haired children.

"Sit down," said Ranklin. But I preferred to stand.

"Well?" said Thomas.

"Have you got the money?" I asked.

"Yes, it's here."

"Then pay it to me."

"To you!" exclaimed both men together.

"Yes, to me. Please ask no questions. Here is the receipt."

They paid the money across the table in

silence. I found the sum was correct, pocketed it, and gave them old Isaac's receipt, with my name to it.

"You will do me a kindness," I said, "by never alluding to this matter again. That is in your interest as much as in mine." I held out my hand. The younger man took it: old Amos did not.

"It *was* the twenty-second," said old Amos suddenly.

I did not answer but turned to go. In the doorway, however, I paused.

"Absolute silence!" I said, as impressively as I could. "Mind, absolute silence is imperative, as much on your behalf as on my own."

Then I went away, and that same night, late, on his return, I brought Isaac Abrams the money. He was terribly put out, and abused me, but the sale—selling up a farmer—had been much to his advantage, and next day he apologised to me for reproaches which he himself declared to have been utterly irrational. I barely responded.

On passing the cobbler's, with some considerable tremor, I found his usual place unoccupied, nor did he appear at the window. This time I did not enter to seek him. He never sat out again: he never occupied his winter-corner. Once only, unexpectedly, I met him in the street. He looked the other way.

Soon afterwards he went to live with his children. I suppose he is not dead. His room is occupied by a rag and bone woman, who drinks.

Nobody says good-day to me along my daily road.

Well, that deed I have just narrated has been the one great event of my fifty-six years of life. In fact it seems about the only thing I have ever *done*, the only actual act. All the rest has just been letting happen. Most people, I suppose, would call the deed a crime. The law would, of course, and the judges, and the lawyers. When a man has been in the midst of such work as mine for more than thirty years, he laughs to think what lawyers and judges call a crime, and what they don't. But some people, the good people, would say it was a sin? I suppose it was. Perhaps I am all wrong—I don't know: I'm not a clever man, and my life has been so tiresome—I suppose it was a sin, but though it was, I cannot help thanking God I had the courage to commit it.

THE RING

RELIGION takes many forms. Ever since little naked man lifted timid eyes to the great, far heavens above him and, glancing down again, saw his little naked neighbour, as wistful, as apprehensive as himself.

Dutch religion is conversely introspective. It realises subjective corruption by objective corruptness. Personal non-perfectibility is the logical inference from the perpetual discovery of your neighbour's faults.

"Old Piety" sat on the seat outside his trim red and white home. The sky was pale-blue with a single bright star in it: the fields were a deeper green. Over the old man's head, in the great fresh chestnut, a thrush was talking about the weather, calling approval to a friend in the beeches beyond of the lovely spring evening and expressing hope that this sort of thing was going to last. "So favourable to nest-building," said the thrush; and it chortled with expectancy. Old Piety drew his slow pipe from his lips.

"Just listen to the birds!" said his wife at her window, "praising their Maker!"

Old Piety smiled a grim smile. He praised his

Maker, honestly, in prosperity and in tribulation, but he knew the birds make that noise because they have to, like a brook.

"I wish men could agree, like birds," continued the wife, with hesitation, always doubtful to say something unreasonable, after forty years of marriage with a man whose every remark was sage.

"Birds don't agree," replied Old Piety.

The buxom wife sighed, a pleasant-faced woman with a curiously mild voice for such a pair of arms. A woman with no will of her own but to follow and obey her husband, telling him everything and asking his advice. "Well, they easily might," she ventured, "they haven't got religion to quarrel about." She gazed up into the green mass of foliage. "It must be quite easy to serve God," she said, "if you haven't got to worry about religion!"

"Woman, you blaspheme!" replied Hannes, *alias* "Old Piety." He spoke with authority, the prosperous, the position-full personage of the place, well-considered, well-intentioned, fairly well-off, a good man, that would have been richer, had all had their due, kindly, if stern, a man who always unhesitatingly knew what was right and unhesitatingly did it. A man who, by the grave of his last orphan grandchild, had said: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord!" and had meant it. "Was heaven so empty?" said the weeping wife.

The house was empty: life was empty:

nothing was left. The single son had grown to man's estate—how long ago it seems!—the joy of his exacting parents' hearts, walking straight, with quick and careful step: he had married a girl as simply virtuous as himself, as welcome a presence by the old folks' hearth: all that was over now, for ever. The son had been struck down, by typhoid, in the bloom of his honest manhood: some months later the widow had closed a pair of tearless eyes, too weary to open again. The children she left behind her, a boy and a girl, had played, like lambent sunshine, through the grandparents' chill, grey lives. They had beamed, with an ever-increasing warmth and radiance, just a little disconcerting, when you are *very* Presbyterian, and a brightness falls, with too much dance and yet more laughter, over your solemn path. The grandparents' attitude was often protestful. The children, happy and harmless withal, grew up in an inevitable atmosphere of: "don't" and "'tis wrong." Most things you wanted to do were wrong in Old Piety's religion. He did not want to do them.

Suddenly, Luke, breaking loose, had "gone for a sailor."—"Queer choice!" mused Old Piety, not understanding at all. The school-master came one day and found for the old man, on a faded map, the place where the sailor lad lay buried—among the black niggers we send the missionaries to—out in China. Grandfather lifted his dim eyes to blithe, blond Everdine.

‘Girls can’t go a-travelling,’ he said with satisfaction, “we shall keep you with us.” But two years later Everdine sailed away on a voyage from which there is no returning. To a land that the schoolmaster wots little of. The chart’s in the Bible. Grandmother, through the long, dull Sunday evenings, prayerfully looked for it there.

Nephews and nieces, and the children of these, were left to the childless couple, but what is another man’s offspring to him whose life now ends with himself? True, the good old name would not die out in the village—far from it!—but that, to the well-informed—*i.e.* everybody—was only as a sugar-coating to an extra-bitter pill. For Hannes Pypers—Old Piety—had quarrelled with his brother Will thirty years ago over the testament of a maiden aunt, and the quarrel had left the brothers dead to each other, except in silently burning wrath through all the slow, side by side summers and winters, alive, each in his own work of underground antagonism and rivalry, fighting everywhere, after an injuriously severed partnership, for greater material prosperity, parish precedence, church place. It was no longer Pypers brothers that built, and bossed, everything in Rondebak. “*Which* Pypers?” either scornful brother now retorted on the inquiring stranger. The years slid on: children and grandchildren passed, impassive, daily, in the narrow streets. William died: that made no difference. Nay, it did: he

had been a church-elder, thereby keeping Hannes out of a greatly coveted office. With fierce contentment the younger brother took possession of the vacant seat in the front state-pew. He wore correct crape-band mourning: "We're not of the common sort," he said. His wife never asked him to notice the dead brother's widow or family, financially far better-off, through the unholy inheritance. The wife thought as "my man" bid her: there was peace in the house. "*I got my little fortin honest,*" was Hannes's only allusion to his wealthier relatives. It came up frequently. His integrity was manifest. And he had a way of nodding up at the minister during the hour-long discourse which had gained him the honorary appellation: "Old Piety."

He honestly deserved it: his religion was of the genuine historic sort he had inherited from a long line of fathers. It was not of the kind that forgives sin or a sinner, not of the kind that allows itself latitude in anything or ever draws a napkin over a stain. But it meant itself. "Whited sepulchres are worst," it said, and made windows to all sides of the human charnel-house. But no man has ever seen his own skeleton. Old Piety's self-investigation was academic. He humbly confessed to his Maker the failings he did not know himself to possess.

Still, he loved what the Dutch Presbyterian calls his "*kerk*." And he respected, with strong animadversion, his minister. These "*Dominies*"—in Dutch parlance—were young and foolish—

the elder shook his head—and they babbled of mysteries that even he could not fathom, but the poor learned, ignorant lads were still, for the time being, “the Dominie.” His voice sank, reverent. The unexpressed desire of his life had been to see a son of his, grandson of his “Dominie,”—*the* Dominie—Dominie of Rondebak. His lips grew thin around his pipe: his face grew hard.

And now a Pypers was Dominie of Rondebak, one of them other Pyperses, nephew James’s pale-haired boy. “Wim was his name?” Old Piety had not voted against him: the poor child’s sermon had not been worse than that of other lads. What a sermon might Everdine’s brother not have preached, had he taken to his books, instead of sailing away to sea! Ah, what a head! But a head’s nothing without grace. Old Piety sighed. Pray Heaven young Wim at least get grace!

The village had followed Wim Pypers’ election with quite unusual interest: it had been a family event. What would Old Piety do? For everything depended on him. Lord paramount and leader supreme of the “Church Council,” of the whole religious sentiment of Rondebak. A thrill ran through the community, when Old Piety gave a mild, colourless vote for Wim.

During nearly a year young Wim Pypers worked on in the difficult, irrational round of parson-apprenticeship, the immature boy-care of a parish. He did his very best. His grand-uncle

never opposed him. Only smiled pityingly sometimes, and, in the inmost seclusion of home, said : "Ah, well!"

The lord of the manor, remembering all the upsets with all the former men, probationers and others, declared he would never again have any other but a rival Pypers for parson, as long as Old Piety lived.

But this chill repose was rudely broken in upon towards Easter, when the great annual celebration of the Communion drew nigh. Old Piety had first spoken to the minister "under four eyes," as he said, stopping him by the green village-duckpond, one morning, amongst much cackling, unable to enter the manse, now that "one of them other Pyperses" dwelt there. The minister had simply answered : "No."

"No? Two can play at no!" said Old Piety.

Therefore, unwilling but constrained, the old man had spoken again, at the meeting of the Church Council. The elders and deacons had turned up foolish faces of amaze. "Ah? Ah?"—yes, Old Piety was right again, of course. Quite true. Nobody to equal Old Piety in appraising the fitness of matters religious! "Ah!" When the old man sat down, there was a weighty silence. "Therefore I must ask of you: 'Will you?'" had been his concluding words.

The minister was very young, white-faced. His eyes were exceedingly troubled: his voice was intentionally firm. "I will not," he said. He felt that he was going against all the brethren.

They screwed up their cloudy faces in a deepening gloom of disapproval.

"So be it," said Old Piety, portentously, and, refusing to chatter over the event amongst the interested brethren, walked, with sententious steps, down the watchful road, home.

Immediately the rival Pyperses closed round their pet bantling, their phoenix, the boy-parson of Rondebak. First they whispered, soon they clamoured, of envy, malice, and uncharitableness under the easy cloak of religiosity. "Not wear a ring, indeed? Not wear a ring? Ha!"

The tall, angular elder stood, on the final Saturday, in the white-washed vestry-room, with his gaping audience of hard-handed brethren around him. Opposite them sat the young minister, alone, his two white hands, with the ring, on his black knee. The fresh morning sunlight played through the green shutters. The more seriously inclined of the villagers waited about or looked across from their work at the dead vestry wall. There was life behind it, inside. The religious life of Rondebak.

"Hand me the Word, Brother Bulk!" commanded Old Piety. His voice was terrible, in its cold impressiveness. He unclasped the faded, stuffy volume, and at once the live words leapt from its page. "'Not with broidered hair,'" he read, pointing a slow finger at the minister's yellow crop, "'or gold, or pearls——'" He stopped, and looked over the rim of his spectacles—they all looked—at the ring!

"Or gold," repeated Old Piety, "or pearls." He nodded. Every man in the little conclave nodded. Except the minister, gazing down steadfastly at the bunch of four pearls on the cheap little ring.

"A popish emblem!" For the Dutch Calvinist sees crosses all over Christianity. He can't help remembering that the cross was set up as an emblem, when the wholesale destruction and slaughter began. If his religion seem unbeautiful, remember that it was the beautiful religion which built up for him, under the shadow of every parish church, the unbeautiful—yet, God! how beautiful!—rack, scaffold, and stake.

"Paul is speaking to women," ventured, timidly, Brother Wilkey, the butcher, whose wife is a Pypers of the other side.

The sole Pypers "of the one side" turned on him:

"He never dreamt he'd *need* to say it to the '*men*'!" cried Old Piety. He waited a moment for his words to sink. "Or d'ye mean to tell me," he continued with ineffable scorn, "that he tells the women not to wear jewels, so the men may put them on?"

All murmured approval. Not one of them wore "jewels." Even the butcher hastily conceded to his neighbour, that "Paul" would have objected to the minister's ring.

The minister looked up at his terrible grand-uncle. "When the prodigal came back," he said, "his father bade them bring him a gold ring——"

"I wasn't aware you was a prodigal," replied Old Piety. He had him there: they separated on that. Poor lamb, better not try to tackle Old Piety!

Every one in the parish now fully understood. That the minister must appear in the pulpit the following morning without that ring on his finger, or Old Piety would refuse to take the Sacrament from his hand. And if Old Piety walked from the Communion table, not an elder would remain.

"I can't help it," said the old man, thinking the matter out, between the slow whiffs of his pipe, beside his open door. The spring evening, of rest from the week's long labour, lay, peacefully silvern, on all the calm pasture and calmer sky. Old Piety sat listening, in repose, to the foolish clamour of the thrushes. In the village also there was plenty of chatter and empty expectancy that night. "'Tis the will of the Lord," said, reverently, old Hannes Pypers.

The good-wife at the window sighed. "I wish it were not so," she said.

"You began it!" he burst out, so vehemently, she read his inner vexation in his tone.

"Not intentionally, father."

He always shrank, when she called him "father," the bereaved of all children! "What's intentional?" he questioned, irritably. "We say and we do things, and they work out wrong. It was you told me of the neighbour's children coming home from Bible-class and saying as the minister had played all the time with his ring."

"That may be only a chemical habit," said the wife. She meant "mechanical."

"Chemical or not, there wouldn't be any habit, if there wasn't any ring. It's just vanity and foolishness. Do you wear a ring? Or I?"

She pointed to his horny finger—the "gold finger" they call it.

"That's different," he said very hastily. "Paul couldn't mean a betrothal ring. Mary!"

He took his old wife's hand and held it. "Not a betrothal ring!" he said. "A betrothal ring isn't—a ring."

"You're sure it's not the minister's betrothal ring?" said the mild wife, dubiously.

"As sure as you are. Sure and certain. With all of us waiting for him to marry! And not to remain alone, like a popish priest. As isn't good in a Christian parish. We should know soon enough, if *he* was to get engaged."

She said no more. Old Piety knew best. She sighed, at thought of to-morrow's deserted Communion table. It is so easy to start a religious wrangle and so almost impossible to stop it.

Yet the minister, it seems, was going to make a last attempt. He came slowly up the path, in the tranquil sunset. The birds shouted to welcome him. Old Piety, smoking serenely, with mixed feelings, watched him draw near.

"Evening, Dominie!"

"Evening—both!" Young Pypers got out of that primal embarrassment better than he had hoped.

"Well?" said the grand-uncle. There had been a considerable wait before he said it. The minister had declined to sit down.

"You will come to the Communion to-morrow?" blurted out the parson. "I have come here on purpose to ask you. In the name of peace—in this village—come!"

"I am wanting to come," replied Old Piety, "but, young man, I daren't receive the cup from a hand that disobeys the Word."

"I can't take off my ring," persisted the young minister eagerly, "won't you believe me? I can't. I have promised solemnly. It would be wicked. I mustn't break my word!"

"I can't mind about your word. It's *the* Word for me, Dominie."

"But the early Christians wore rings. James expressly speaks of a man coming into their assemblies with a gold ring on——"

"Yes," retorted the elder quickly, "and he tells them not to give him a foremost place."

Again the minister felt squashed. But a Dutch minister must get accustomed to that feeling. He said mildly: "I want you to take my word for it, that it's my duty to go on wearing that ring."

At last the good wife looked up from her knitting:

"Why not say it's your engagement ring?" She spoke the words as a woman's soft heart speaks them.

"Because it isn't!" cried her husband, brushing her aside, his sharp eyes on the young man's

face. "Leave us, wife!" he said, and motioned her to close the window. "This is a matter between man and man."

As soon as they were alone, he continued: "Young man, let us understand each other. You are not betrothed."

The minister hesitated. "No," he said softly.

"I knew that. Such things"—his eyes sank to the ring—"are not kept secret without good reason. We all, here in Rondebak, would be glad to see you marry."

The minister made no reply.

"That ring, then, to which you cling so unreasonably, is a memory of youthful folly. Hush!"—but the minister had not stirred—"let an old man speak plainly! I, too, have been young, long ago. At your age I knew the time had come to leave off. And I had not the care of souls."

Still the minister was silent: his silence irritated the elder.

"The time has come to forget student flirtations, boy."—The elder's voice grew suddenly hard: his pipe sent up swift blue curls. "Get a wife. Are these thoughts to go filling a preacher's mind, while he catechises the school-children?—twisting his ring all the time? What do you think of, minister"—he faced round—oh, the stern old face!—"while you preach and finger your ring?"

The young clergyman dropped his face on his hands.

"You see that I knew," said Old Piety.

The minister lifted his face. "How much do you know?" he gasped.

"Tut! tut!—enough. Be sure your sin will find you out."

"You know nothing," said the minister.

"I know this, that you cannot remain minister of Rondebak with yon memory of dead folly on your finger. Choose!"

"Choose?" repeated the minister, white.

"Yes, I see clear. Oh, I see very clear. It is not a little matter. It is the weightiest that has ever come to me, since I became an elder. Your dead and buried—no, not buried—flirtations to rise up between your people and you!"

"You hate me, because I am one of the other Pyperses."

"The Lord forgive you, boy! I am only doing my duty by the flock that appointed me to watch over them and you." There was a sincerity in the old man's voice which suddenly touched his antagonist.

"Uncle—I want you to have faith in me. It's all right."

Old Piety shook his head. "Things may be right enough in another young man," he said, measuring his words, "that are wrong in a minister. *Tell me, is there a name inside that ring?*"

"There is," said Wim Pypers in a whisper.

The old man rose. "Dominie," he said, "I don't pry into your secrets. A woman's at the

bottom of most men's ruin. But you're not the right minister for Rondebak."

The nephew had risen too. He stood gazing at old Pypers with hollow eyes. Then a rush of fire filled them. "You believe that I—that she—that she's a married woman or engaged to another or—or Heaven knows what you believe!" he cried. He drew off his ring and held it out. "You shall have my secret," he said.

With automatic curiosity the old man took the little gold hoop and peered into its inner circle. "Everdine," he spelled under the long, still shadows. The name is an uncommon one. He looked up, vaguely conscious of near discomfort. "What of that?" he said. He put back the ring. "I want to hear nothing more."

"But you shall here more—much—all!" cried the minister. "You have bidden me choose—*choose*—between my life-task, my dear work, my mother, my honour, my, my everything and your—*piety*! I choose. I choose!" He checked himself. "Nay, give me back the ring and leave me in peace," he said.

"Who was this Everdine?" the old man made answer. The minister, gazing straight at his hatchet-face, saw no sign of relenting.

"She was your Everdine," said the minister desperately. "Your grandchild. She loved me, and I loved her, and we knew it was a useless, hopeless love. We kept it to ourselves, in a few hurried, secret snatches. "'Grandfather would never forgive me,' was what she always said."

"Grandfather would never—my Everdine!" Stammering, staggering, the old man sank upon the seat. He stared dimly at young Wim Pypers. "Everdine—kept this secret?—died with it?—loved?"

"It was the one brightness of her life," said the minister tenderly and brutally. "After her brother went to sea. But she knew it was hopeless. 'His heart is full of hate!' she always said. It would kill her to speak of her love to you. It killed her not to."

"Loved," repeated the old man on the seat, staring in front of him, stunned. "Loved and never told us. Loved . . . you!" That was a new thought. "And bought you, and gave you—the ring." It dropped from his fingers, the poor little jewel. The minister snatched it up, stood rubbing it gently on his sleeve.

"She gave it me," he said, "when she kne—knew"—his voice gave way: he struggled on. "She had got away to buy it at the fair. She put it on and she made me promise to wear it, always, even if—if—" He broke down miserably. After some time he added: "It was like her to think of that, in her unselfishness. We were a pair of children. And she was the better child of the two."

"You will marry in time," said the old man. "And never told us. Us that had brought her up from her babyhood." The pipe slipped from his hand.

"She was afraid of you—oh, so afraid! And

she said it was quite useless. She knew how you hated us all."

The old man broke out at him. "I hated no one. You have robbed me of my money. And my child!"

The young minister shook his head sadly. "She was afraid," he said, "she was always afraid of you. 'It would kill me to tell grandfather: he would never forgive me for loving one of the other Pyperses.' That was what she always said. And then death came and ended it all."

Old Piety sat staring at the solemn landscape. The evening deepened. The birds were silent. He made no answer, no answer at all.

"You will let me keep the ring," said the minister, almost pleadingly. He replaced it on his finger. No answer but a groan. "We will tell them I have explained it all to you. Nobody shall know. We need not say anything about your having mis—been mistaken."

Old Piety shivered down into a corner of the seat. "I—I was mistaken," he said, "I was mistaken." He said it, he who had never been mistaken in his life.

"Uncle," began the young minister faintly, "she loved you. Only, she didn't understand about your love for her. And, perhaps, now, if you and I try to understand each other——"

The old man interrupted him: "Love understands," said Old Piety. "I *was* mistaken. Had I loved her, would she ever—would you—boy!

—Dominie!—though I—though I—how does it go, boy?—and have not love!—go preach that in Rondebak! Preach it with a ring on your finger or without! She never dared to tell us! Preach it to-morrow! I'll tell them I'll need to have it preached a many a time to me!"

THE STORY OF THE GREAT HAIL-GAMBLE

“**B**UT, uncle——”

The fat old priest stopped his comfortable roll. He wiped his red face in the blazing July sun, and he held up a protesting hand—fat—with a damp handkerchief.

“No, Steven,” he said, “I cannot help you. I will not deny that I am possessed of some small earthly means, but I am not at liberty, if I would, to dispose of these in your favour.”

The young nephew looked at the old uncle—at the latter’s round paunch and rubicund countenance.

“You are probably thinking,” said the uncle, resuming his walk, “of the legacy left me by that venerable spinster——”

“Well, I was,” interrupted the nephew.

“She left it me on the distinct understanding that I was to devote its revenues during my life, and afterwards, to the good of the Church.”

“O—o—oh!” said Steven.

There were all sorts of sentiments in that “oh.” He was in love; he was desperate; he had never been afraid of his uncle. He had seen

him influenced by his second bottle of Burgundy too frequently for that.

"You must leave me to decide, if you please," said the old man sharply; "what is for the good of the Church and what is not. In this village the conservation of my health is more for the good of the Church than anything I could devise. Therefore I have built a good house for myself, and—and—I admit it—stocked a good cellar."

"And engaged—I am glad to say—a good cook."

"You are insolent beyond belief. But, however insolent you may be, it is not necessary for the welfare of the Church that I bestow on you the money Farmer Stoppel now demands, at the last moment, before he will let you marry his daughter."

"I only meant," said Steven more humbly, "that there was nothing about 'the good of the Church' in the will."

"Did you, perhaps, hear the estimable lady's dying injunctions? I trow not. I am ashamed of you, Steven, my own brother's son. This greed of the world's goods will work your ruin."

"I want to marry Maaiken; I love her," said Steven.

"The desire, in itself, is not blameworthy, and her father has enough for you both."

"But it is only natural, uncle, that he should want me to pay part of the tavern he is getting for us. The price is a good deal more than he had expected."

Again the uncle held up the hot hand and the damp handkerchief.

"Peace! And so *I* am to pay the two thousand guilders he asks! No, my son. He should have thought of it sooner. To-morrow morning we sign the contract, and I give you my blessing and the two pewter pots."

"He says he won't sign."

The priest smiled. "He will."

"The pots are my own by my grandfather's will."

"He was a wonderfully perspicacious old man. It looks as if he had foreseen that you would one day keep a tavern."

The good father stood by his little garden gate. Along the trim path were some bright old-fashioned flowers for ornament, and behind them far more numerous vegetables for use. The evening sky was beautiful with the lessening heat of the cloudless day. All about, on the gentle slopes, spread the wide glory of the barley harvest.

Baas Stoppel came by, the rich farmer, with his stupid cow-face and his rows of metal buttons. He came by intentionally. So he stopped.

"Goodevening, Stoppel," said Father Bullebak pleasantly.

The other grumbled a "good evening," but he touched the sort of black nightcap he wore.

"An important ceremony to-morrow morning, Stoppel. We shall take care to be with you in good time."

"I hope you've considered about that two thousand, father. It isn't fair that it should *all* come from me."

"Tut, tut, my son! Your goods are your own, and mine are our mother's. Such little possessions as I have."

"'Tisn't fair," repeated the peasant, chewing his pipe.

The father looked at the other's face. "You have my last word," he said sharply; and he turned away, and walked majestically down his path, evincing great, but not unusual, interest in his salads.

The farmer was left in sullen contemplation of his prospective son-in-law. That hapless youth forced a sickly smile.

"D—— all priests!" burst out Stoppel suddenly. "The holy Virgin forgive me! If 'twasn't they can d—— us, Lord, *how* we'd d—— them!"

Having given utterance to which vigorous sentiment, he too turned on his heel. The young man, left standing alone, heaved a sigh.

In the house the father found an old acquaintance waiting for him—Brother Ambrosius (in the world Janus Dorstig), the Prior or clerical director of the big ecclesiastical brewery away over the German frontier.

"Aha!" he said; "the barley brings you, I suppose?"

"Of course it does. I hope the price isn't high this year?"

"Let's sit down and talk it over," said Bullebak.

He sank into his armchair, and called for a bottle—not of beer.

"You haven't talked about the price yet?" he said, sipping his glass.

"No," replied the other, who was also round and rubicund, but smaller, sipping his.

"It's a fine year. Weather perfect still, and the fields ripe."

"I saw them coming along. First rate."

"All you passed were Farmer Stoppel's. He grows all the barley in these parts."

"I must get at him. It's my first season as director. I'm especially anxious to make a good bargain. You must help me, Bullebak."

"Why must I help you?"

The two looked at each other. "On behalf of the Church——" began Brother Ambrosius.

"Twenty per cent. on your profits," said Bullebak, and refilled the other's glass.

"Twenty per cent. on my——?"

"Yes. We can all see you are green in these sort of transactions, brother. The reverend fathers might have selected——there!—there! Twenty per cent. on whatever he drops off his original price. For—for the Church, as you say—in this village. For my poor."

"Ah, well—your poor!"

"There are many of us," said the father, looking round his comfortable room. Thoughtfully he replenished his glass.

"It is all a gamble, as you know," he said. "It depends on the weather till the last. If a bad thunderstorm were to burst over the place within forty-eight hours of now—holy Virgin!"—he threw up his hands—"whatever price you paid would be too much."

"I should get it all in immediately after purchasing."

"Of course. The whole village reckons on that. 'Tis a gamble."

The clerical brewer sat musing. "If only one could be *sure*," he said.

"Yes, indeed! But one can't. The next best thing is for the peasants to *think* one can be sure." He grinned quietly over all his fat, double-chinned face.

"But, stupid as they are, one can hardly manage that."

The village priest patted his much-besmeared waistcoat. He lifted his long black coat over his knickerbocker knees. "I have managed it," he said, pompously.

"How?"

"My dear brother, that is my secret."

"Tell me."

"Will you send me a cask of your next brew?"

"It is not mine to give away. But I'll arrange about it, if you help me with this Stoppel."

"Well, I will tell you, for we should have no secrets from each other and all from outsiders. Besides, I have already told our dear bishop.

Foolishly, perhaps, warmed by his excellent claret ; but it all turned out well, for he was so pleased with my influence over the people that he got me this." He fingered a small cross at his bosom, which the other man watched with greedy eyes. "'Influence,' said Monseigneur—'influence, in season and out of season.' 'Especially in the barley season,' said I. You see, we are very peculiarly situated here. Somehow, in our dip behind the hills, we seem to attract the thunderstorms. And with us, more than in any other part I ever saw, the thunderstorms seem to bring hail. It isn't the rain that matters, as you know, it's the hail. During these few days of ripe harvest our peasants live, when the weather has reached this white heat, in hourly dread of a hail-storm, such as we had five years ago. We have not yet forgotten that. It nearly ruined us."

"I remember hearing about it," said the brother. "Why don't they insure?"

"They say they think it's wrong—distrusting the blessed saints ; but, in reality, they grudge the money. They prefer to run the risk. And they come to me all day long at this time to inquire what I think of the weather."

"But you can't influence the weather."

Father Bullebak smiled. "Your faith is not great, brother," he said. "Fortunately theirs is greater. If I tell them 'Tis about to rain, for your sins,' they howl out some sort of repentance. This is my time for getting in my—my small contributions."

"But you must constantly be wrong."

Again the fat father smiled. "Not as often as you think." He got up and moved across to a dark corner of his room. "This," he said, with a certain solemnity, "is my oracle!" And he showed, up against a bookcase, a barometer. "The best to be procured for money," he said; "as accurate as they make them. As soon as I saw how the—the wind lay in this parish, I had it out from Paris. Barometers of any kind are unknown among the peasantry: if they heard of them they would only call them 'superstitions,' a word they are fond of for any scientific thing they don't understand. Some of the older ones still call the telegraph a 'supersition.' So you see, I always know what the weather is going to be some twelve to twenty hours before them."

"But they have their own signs," said the brother, open-mouthed.

"No. Only mountaineers and sea-folk have those. The ordinary peasant is absolutely ignorant or invariably wrong about weather-forecasts."

"You amaze me," said Brother Ambrosius.

"Never be amazed, brother. It is a bad habit for a priest. True, I am older than you: I have long ago given it up." He struck a match in the falling shadows, and examined his instrument. "As high as it can go," he said. "Set fair." There was a pause. "Now, if I frighten Stoppel with a threat of a thunderstorm in this heat, you—you will be able to brew cheaper beer, brother."

"The price will be the same," said Ambrosius, with a grin.

"So much the better for the Church, brother. Twenty per cent. is very little. We ought to go halves."

"Impossible. The bishop would never allow it!"

"Well, well!" The father heaved a big sigh. "A quarter of what he lets fall, if I frighten him very thoroughly."

"I should like to see it done," said Ambrosius.

"You doubt my power?" His eyes flashed. "Dear brother, you have little experience, I presume, of our peasants?"

"I am a town-bred man," said Ambrosius.

A letter was sent off to Stoppel instanter, asking him whether he could receive the Brother Brewer-master that night, to treat of a large purchase of barley for the monastery of Simpelvelden. "To-morrow at eleven," said Father Bullebak, "we draw up the marriage settlement, at his house, between my good-for-nothing nephew and Stoppel's pretty daughter. The man is very contrary. He wants me—ridiculous!—to give a marriage portion to my dead brother's son."

"Absurd indeed," replied Ambrosius. "I am sorry you should have a good-for-nothing nephew."

"He must be good for nothing, for he refuses to confess to me." The brother looked at the father. "Shall we finish the bottle?" suggested

the good old priest. They finished it. It was past nine before a reply came from Stoppel that he had gone to bed, but would be at the parsonage house in the morning.

When he arrived, in the full glow of the cloudless sunshine, he heard from the pleasant cook that their reverences were at mass. "H'm, h'm! I half thought I might be too early," murmured Stoppel. "There's no objection, I suppose, to my waiting in his reverence's room?"

"Oh, come in, by all means, Boer," said the cook. "And pray, how is the charming bride?"

The bride, it appears, was well.

"But what heat!" said Stoppel, as he entered the cool study. "I only hope it won't turn thundery."

"I hope not indeed," said the comely cook.

Left to himself, Boer Stoppel first recovered from his walk. Then he made a tour of inspection round the room, and was greatly interested in some of its contents. Soon after he had sat down again, with no expression at all on his stolid face, the two clerical gentlemen entered.

"Oh, sorry to have kept you waiting," began Bullebak, "but the Church——"

"I knew I was a bit early. I expected to wait here a bit," said the farmer.

"Brother Ambrosius here, the Brother Brewer-master of the good brothers of Simpelvelden, would like to buy as much of his barley as he can from a good Catholic like you."

The farmer did obeisance to Brother Ambrosius. "Yes, I'm a good Catholic," he said.

"I am glad to hear it," replied the brother. "Is the barley good?"

"Your reverence had better come and see it."

"Not so fast!" Ambrosius sat down, and an endless negotiation commenced, with all the ins and outs and ups and downs of peasant intrigue in matters of business. "Yes, it is worth at least four thousand," Stoppel repeated, when at last they had got so far that he could make such a statement without protest. Each of them had consumed two glasses of corn-brandy before they reached this point. There was a distinct satisfaction in having attained a fresh stage, and therefore Stoppel said his sentence again.

"Possibly. But there is always the risk, with such weather as this, of a violent thunderstorm before the day is out."

"You must harvest at once," replied Stoppel.

"I should certainly do so. But a hailstorm, such as you often have here, is the affair of half an hour."

"Five minutes," said Bullebak, thinking what a fool dear Brother Ambrosius was. Stoppel scowled at his parish priest covertly. The latter, who had been standing by the bookcase, came hastily forward.

"Five minutes!" he repeated, in some perturbation. "Whereby I mean, dear brother, could you spare me five minutes in the next

room? Only five minutes. My good Stoppel, excuse us! The—the affairs of the Church, you know——”

The two black figures disappeared through the doorway. Stoppel poured himself out a third glass of corn-brandy. There was no expression at all on his face.

“My good Ambrosius!” hissed the father, “the barometer is down into the lowest depths. I have never seen it so bad. Such a sudden fall can mean nothing but a violent storm before the day is out! It’s terrific. And the thunder is absolutely certain to bring hail!”

“Thank you for telling me, father. Then I won’t buy.”

“Nonsense. Hail isn’t nearly so bad for you, once you’ve bought, for your beer, as it is for him, if wanting to sell. Offer him four thousand if the weather remains fine, and three thousand if it rains before to-morrow night.”

“But I don’t like——” pleaded Brother Ambrosius.

“I tell you it’s a gamble. He’ll like that. They all like a gamble. And you’ll get your barley cheap.” He almost pushed the Brother-Brewer into the other room. “Now settle your business together!” he said.

“The risk is too great,” declared Ambrosius to Stoppel. “I daren’t take it: the sum is too large. Let us say four thousand if the weather remains fine, but three thousand if we have a thunderstorm before to-morrow night.”

The farmer looked out at the clear, hot sky. "A hailstorm," he said.

Brother Ambrosius and Father Bullebak exchanged a wink. "So be it, a hailstorm," said the brother.

After a great deal more talk, the affair seemed nearly settled, when the farmer cried: "Hold! 'Tis not fair that all the risk should be on my side, and all the chance of profit on yours!"

"I thought you were a good Catholic," said Ambrosius.

"So I am, but if the weather remains fair till you've *done*, I must have five thousand. That's an honest bargain. The other's lop-sided."

Again the two ecclesiastics looked at each other. There was some more discussion, and another glass of brandy was consumed.—"Oh, do it, by all means," decided Bullebak, and he laughed confidently. Thus the matter was finally arranged, and Stoppel put a few words upon paper, so that there might be no misunderstandings, he said.

Thereupon Beldebel was introduced—the sexton, gravedigger, communal crier, barber, and servant to the priest. He was ordered to fetch, at once, his big bell, and to hurry to the market-place and through all the country-side, summoning the whole population to come and reap the barley fields. The school was given a holiday, that the children might bind the sheaves. And all for the good of Mother Church and the beer

of the pious fathers of Simpelvelden. "You'll get it in before nightfall," said Bullebak.

"Impossible!" cried Ambrosius.

The priest smiled his smile. "You don't know what I promise them," he answered.

When all this had been settled, and the labourers had been started in the outlying parishes (where a couple of men were sent on bicycles), the time had come for the signature of the marriage contract. In these parts that formality is not in itself an occasion for festivities: it is the signal that the bridal celebrations (which last, more or less, a fortnight) may begin. The notary and a couple of clerks were waiting at Stoppel's farmhouse, when the three speculators arrived. That he came there, instead of the parties calling on him, was a sure proof of the social importance and actual wealth of the bride's father. That neither the priest nor the father had alluded in any way, during their walk, to the matter regarding which they were at variance, may be taken as characteristic of the peasant class, to which both of them belonged.

The women, the substantial, grave-looking mother, and the pretty girl—had donned their best clothes. The men were as usual. The notary had put on his seriously smiling face; but then, that was one of his usual three faces.

The whole party ranged themselves in a half-circle: the bride with her parents beside her, the bridegroom flanked by his uncle, and Brother

Ambrosius as a superfluous but highly honoured guest. The notary, whose name was Kladdeboel, sat down to a green table-cloth and a couple of blue documents, and hemmed and hawed. Then he asked for ink, which was given him; though Vrouw Stoppel disapproved of ink anywhere, on principle, as representative, in her mind, only of blots, or of something that somebody ought never to have signed.

The notary then proceeded to read the settlement. He was old and blind, and had been incapacitated for years; but Bullebak had maintained him in his position, in spite of the occasional timid protests of the Burgomaster, because Kladdeboel made such estimable suggestions to the old people who talked to him about their wills. "A very worthy and deserving public officer, Monseigneur," said Bullebak at headquarters, "a supporter to be grateful for in these days of indifference and irreligion." So the notary stumbled through his official documents, and his clerk helped him on, with a push to the right or the left, as he lurched, like a drunken man, among his names and his dates and the cumbersome legal phrases.

"The aforesaid Maaiken Stoppel, Bride of Heaven——" he read.

"Steven, Steven," said the clerk.

"Bride of Steven." The notary's nose sank among his rustling papers.

The correction had caused him to lose the place. The clerk got up and found it for him.

Not recognising it, he scolded his patient servitor for trying to make him skip an important bit. "Which would have made the whole act invalid," he said testily. "How can you be so careless, Drabbelkoek! I must go back."

"Always so conscientious," said the priest in a loud voice.

"The aforesaid Madam Stoppel——" read the fumbling notary.

For a moment the clerk, after his rebuff, did not dare to suggest an alteration.

The notary, having dropped and recovered his eyeglasses, recommenced: "The aforesaid Madam Stoppel, bride of Steven——"

"Excuse me—no!" said the Vrouw.

"Eh?—ah?" queried Kladdeboel, peering over his papers.

"I've been a bride once," said the Vrouw, with great decision, "and I don't want to be one ever again."

"Glad you're so anxious to keep me," put in the sardonic farmer.

"I didn't say that," replied the Vrouw.

The clerk and the priest, meanwhile, had picked up the notary, who started off again with "Hermann Stoppel will marry his wife."

"With Mary his wife," gently suggested the patient Drabbelkoek.

They got to the end somehow. The notary laid down his papers, took up the pen and dropped a blot.

"Ah!" squeaked Vrouw Stoppel, as it fell.

"Oh, no matter, no matter," she added hastily. "It's on the papers."

The notary stared indignantly at her. Then he turned, still more indignantly, on his clerk. "Why, there's ink in it!" he cried.

The clerk apologised for the pen. And yet such is the habit of pens, when emerging from an inkstand.

The notary looked hastily for blotting-paper, and smeared his sleeve all across the document in doing so. "You never put anything where I can find it," he said. "It's really a mercy, with such a clerk as you, that my eyesight remains so good. Dear, dear me!" He surveyed the havoc he had made.

Steven, who had come nearer, burst out laughing. "Oh, I say," he cried, "you've wiped out the 2! It reads twenty thousand guilders—look here, Stoppel—instead of twenty-two!"

The old notary, turning to snatch at the document, upset the entire inkstand. The vrouw rushed, screaming—the green cloth being lost anyway—to the rescue of her carpet; and in the general scrimmage and cackle that ensued Kladdeboel was heard protesting that it was all Steven's or else Drabbelkoek's fault.

When order was at last restored, Boer Stoppel was discovered placid in his arm-chair, not having made a movement or spoken a word. Now, in the lull of expectancy, he opened his lips. "It's quite right," he said,—“quite right. I meant him to strike out the 2.”

"You never told me a word about it," exclaimed the much ruffled notary.

"Well, then, it was Providence," replied the shameless Stoppel. "Lord, yes, it must have been Providence. Take out that 2, it says, and put in the lad's uncle. Put him in for two thousand, it says."

"So it was Providence upset the inkstand!" cried Steven.

"It certainly wasn't me!" explained the notary.

"Providence couldn't do such a wicked thing," exclaimed the farm-wife, her eyes on the green table-cloth.

The good priest had risen. He swept his arm over the whole lot of them. "Peace!" he said. Then he turned to the head of the house. "Stoppel," he said sternly, "this is unseemly fooling. We have no time to lose. We are anxious to get back to the barley-fields."

"Yes, your reverence," answered Stoppel, "so am I. It's important that we should hurry on the work, though the sky seems set fair. But there's no knowing. And they won't get ready to-day."

"Then let's sign and have done with it."

Stoppel dropped his heavy eyebrows over his half-frightened eyes.

"I won't sign," he said doggedly, "unless you put in that two thousand. Only two—and I'm giving twenty. Providence itself says it isn't fair."

"How dare you, a sinner, mention Providence!"

"I won't sign," shouted Stoppel.

"Is this your last word?"

Stoppel almost whispered: "Yes."

His daughter began to cry. The priest stood forth splendid.

"Unhappy man!" he thundered. "Your love of lucre will be your bane! For a paltry two thousand you resist the command of your Church. You jeopardise your soul for a trifle—for gold that is dross. What prevents me?—but I will give you one more chance."

"Oh, do, father!" wailed the woman.

"'Tisn't fair," muttered Stoppel. "No, I won't."

"Then your ruin be upon your own head! You thought to gain a thousand florins from this reverend brother! Even the Church was not safe from your extortions! You shall *not* gain them, neither from him nor from me! On the contrary, you shall lose two! The Church herself shall show you her irresistible power! Oh, Saint—oh, Saint——" He stopped: his face grew purple—he bent anxiously over Brother Ambrosius. "Dear me! I must be losing my senses," he whispered. "Which saint is it we pray to for hail?"

"I don't know," the other whispered back, frightened. "Say 'Saint Anthony of Padua.' He's the one that gives us most things we want."

"No, no—that won't do." He drew himself up to his full height, and, thrusting back the

Brother Brewer, "No, reverend brother!" he cried aloud, "I beseech you, stop your pleading! Ask no pity for this hardened sinner! Oh, blessed Saint Aquarius, show this reprobate the error of his ways! Teach him, oh, blessed Saint Aquarius, that no man, not even the richest farmer in the village, can make war upon the Church! Let storm and thunder arise from the west"—he stretched a terrible finger to the cloudless window—"and confound him! Oh, blessed Saint Aquarius, give hail!"

At the last word a shudder ran through his audience. The women were crying bitterly; all the men—even Stoppel—turned pale.

"I've always done my duty by the Church," stammered Stoppel. "'Tisn't fair. . . ."

"Won't you repent?" pleaded fat, good-natured little Brother Ambrosius.

"If he does, it will cost you two thousand guilders," said Bullebak, standing tall and terrible, his great arms crossed on his round chest. "You see, Stoppel, how magnanimous the Church is. She pleads with you at a cost to herself of nearly seven hundred guilders a word!"

"Oh, Stoppel, repent!" sobbed his spouse.

The farmer gazed at all the people present, from one to the other, and back again.

"Oh, Stoppel, repent!" screamed Vrouw Stoppel.

That decided him. He looked at the notary; he looked at the man who would soon be his son-in-law. No, he was not going to knuckle

under to his clamorous wife before them all, and thus make himself permanently ridiculous.

"I'll take my chance," he said. "If I gain my two thousand by to-morrow night, you shall have them, Steven Bullebak! We'll put off signing the contract till then!"

The priests swept to the door. "Oh, Saint Aquarius!" bellowed Bullebak in the doorway, "hail down—hail down—hailstones on the land before to-morrow night! Before to-morrow night, hail down—hail——" His voice died away in the distance.

The rest stood ill at ease. "We'll sign the contract at this time the day after to-morrow, Notary," said the farmer. "If the weather's fine, Steven shall have the two thousand. They'll have come out of the pocket of the Church."

"And if the storm comes?" questioned Steven anxiously.

"Then you shall have them too. I can't fight against the blessed saints."

The notary took his hat and shook his head. "I never knew you were an infidel, Stoppel," he said.

"I'm not an infidel. But 't isn't fair. The Holy Virgin herself 'd say it wasn't fair. And I'm not such a fool as his reverence thinks. There's one or two things I know that his reverence thinks I don't."

All that day the men and women and children worked in the great fields, but not with the

frantic vehemence of former years. There was not such haste, it appeared, to be ready. The two clerical gentlemen walked about encouraging them, but with gentleness. The heat was very great. The sky was a cloudless blue.

Next morning the work was resumed, but with even greater deliberation. The sky was an unbroken blue. The heat was intense. The clerical gentlemen walked among the people, telling them how hot it was, and advising them not to over-fatigue themselves. Father Bullebak frequently consulted the deep silence of the west. Brother Ambrosius asked him occasionally what he thought of the weather, and the third time his reply was quite rude. They partook of their midday meal in strained monosyllabic intercourse. Before and after it Father Bullebak studied the barometer—down in the lowest depths. He shook his head. His nap was a failure. Soon he was out again among the reapers, telling them not to over-exert themselves.

It was all in vain. As the sun sank, on the second evening, in untarnished glory, the last lingering sheaves were bound up. Then Farmer Stoppel, whose pride had kept him from coming to hurry the harvesters, sallied forth and stood gazing at the stubble, on the fields.

In the study of the parsonage the two ecclesiastics were together. There was no bottle of wine between them. Each thought his own thoughts. To his, Brother Ambrosius gave utterance.

"It's your fault," he said; "yes, Father, I must say it. 'Tis your fault. You prayed to the wrong saint, and I told you at the time. There isn't any such saint as Aquarius. Why, what *could* be the use of praying to Aquarius? I believe he was a heathen god." He went on about this until Bullebak snatched him up :

"Oh, hang you," cried the good old priest, "with your praying to Aquarius! 'Tisn't that. 'Tis my barometer gone wrong, or mad, or something—my Paris barometer, that I could trust as I could trust my own soul." He rose, fiercely, and stalked across to the instrument. Looking at it—"I could dash it to the ground," he said.

"I always thought there was something evil in trusting to these so-called scientific inventions," said the brother, shaking his head, "and now I know it. After all, we have no authority that barometers——" He jumped, for an oath had burst from the lips of Bullebak.

The father had loosened the barometer from the bookcase to examine the back part of it ; and there, in the receptacle for the mercury, was a neat little crack, through which evidently a large amount of the liquid had been allowed to escape.

"The thing's broken!" he screamed. Then : "It's been tampered with!" Then : "Oh, the infidel ! the atheist ! the blasphemer !"

"Who ? What ?" asked the simpler Ambrosius.

"Here he did it !" shouted Bullebak, "whilst we were at mass. He wouldn't have us go to

him! He came here! He came too early on purpose. Oh, the Pharisee! The Sadducee and publican! I'll get him excommunicated for this!"

"Pooh! we gambled and we've lost," said Brother Ambrosius.

Next morning Farmer Stoppel signed a clean contract, without a grin, and accorded Steven the extra two thousand guilders. Father Bullebak was not present.

"Well, he *must* give me the two pewter pots, at any rate," said Steven, with rather a rueful countenance.

"He'll give you more than that, or I'll let out on him!" replied the farmer, and for the first time his features relaxed into a grin. Pressed further to explain his cryptic meaning, he resolutely refused. "The blessed saints forfend," he said devoutly, and took off his black nightcap, "that I should say or do anything that might injure the Church!"

TEETOTAL

THE wind howled outside in gusts. The rain flung a fretful drizzle against the window-panes. The outlook was raw and shivery. Rebecca drew the red rep curtains enclosing the golden glow of the lamp.

Klaas Brunting—old Baas Klaas—sat watching his sister's movements; sat solid, pipe in mouth, skull-cap on head, filling, with the folds of his ample dressing-gown, his accustomed arm-chair by the fire. It was Saturday evening. The cat purred. The winter roses bloomed, a persistent crimson, on Klaas's carpet slippers. He stretched out his feet to the warmth, and the cat opened a mildly apprehensive eye. But her master could get what he wanted without disturbing her. He would have disturbed her else, remorselessly, or any one on earth, or under the earth, for the matter of that.

Rebecca stooped and stroked the cat, speaking softly. Old Klaas watched, with a gleam under his eyelids that might have been a smile or a sneer.

"Pussy, pussy," murmured Rebecca.

Nobody took the slightest notice.

"'Tis a miserable evening," continued the spinster.

The cat pursed up her cheeks, purring louder.

"Sam's late," persisted the cat's mistress—if, at least, she was a mistress of anything in that house.

"Seven minutes," said the house's master. He drew his pipe from his projecting under-lip and pointed it at nothing. "I never," he added, after a solemn pause of deliberate reflection, "was seven minutes late in my life." And he put back the pipe with a snap.

"You were always so exact. I never knew anybody quite so exact as you," spoke Rebecca wistfully. She busied herself with the tea-things, and presently she sighed.

"Yes," said old Klaas.

It was true. All his life long he had been exact and exacting. He had worked himself up from very humble beginnings, in the little town, to a position of moderate importance. The cheesemonger's shop he had started in as an ill-treated errand-boy had long been his own. "Everybody is liable to make mistakes," he frequently declared, whereby he meant that he had never made one; and he was very indignant, or scornful, if any one else did. Angry when he—Klaas Brunting—lost by the other's error, scornful when he gained. As for his sister—poor, thriftless thing!—he thanked Heaven he had always been enabled to provide for her. That, in fact, was the chiefest of his innumerable

merits. Some people objected to the epithet "thrifless" when applied to the neatest and carefulest housekeeper in Valburg. But Klaas Brunting had known his sister to give a penny to a drunken tramp. He himself had been for many years a deacon, and sat where the deacons sit in church.

"Sam isn't often as late as this," resumed Rebecca, casting a glance at the loud-ticking Frisian clock.

"Likely he's waiting for the rain to stop," replied her brother. And he added, with a fierce chuckle: "As if any fool couldn't see it'll rain all night."

"Sam's no fool," protested Rebecca. She put down her brother's second cup beside him with what was almost a jerk. Klaas's swollen cheeks indicated an internal smile. He knew, and ignored, this one weak point.

"No, Sam's a man of good, practical common-sense. His judgment never runs away with him," he persisted, for he was jealous of his sister's affection, or rather, let us say, devotion, refusing to share it with any one but the cat.

"His heart does," said Rebecca, and she went to the window and, drawing aside a curtain, peered out into the rain.

Klaas sniffed. "I suppose *you* know what that means," he mumbled. "But if Sam had had a business of his own, instead of being a poor clerk on fixed pay, he'd never have been out of the bankruptcy court."

"We can't all make money," retorted Rebecca, behind the curtain. Her heart fluttered; she steadied her voice, expecting his reply.

"No, some of us can spend the money of other people's making." Hard-headed reckoner though he was, it would never have occurred to him, nor to her, that her house-wifery meant money-making for him.

But Rebecca's attention had fled to the other side of the glass. She screamed a little scream of surprise. "Why, he's walking up and down across the street!" she cried. "Why, he's walking up and down in the rain! Sam!"

"Pooh! He's cracked!" said Klaas Brunting indignantly. "And twenty minutes late."

"Sam! Sam!" cried Rebecca, rapping the window-pane.

"Don't break the window!" exclaimed Klaas.

"Sam! Remember your bad chest!" shrieked Rebecca. The man on the other side of the road heard the ticking; he crossed with a little run, that bespoke a sudden resolve, and was ushered into the warm sitting-room by the expostulating old maid.

Samuel Roskam was the single and life-long, intimate friend of the Bruntings. He was of their age—between fifty and sixty—of their circle, from infancy, and their social status, almost of their family, being some sort of cousin, certainly not very much removed in anything—Rebecca could have told the exact degree of relationship. There had never been, for more than one day,

twenty miles between them. But a greater distance had developed, in so far that Klaas Brunting had grown richer, slowly, by his own efforts, and Sam poorer, suddenly, through a brother's fault. Up to thirty—half-way through their closely-connected existence—it was Sam, with his small patrimony, who had been the envied rich relation; then one day—the whole thing compressed into twenty-four hours—Sam's brother had absconded, and written to say there was nothing left of Sam's money, and shot himself in a city hotel. Sam Roskam went on with his work—as a clerk—in the little local town hall. "It's a good thing Lucy wouldn't have me," was all he said; for, seven years before, he had taken his courage in both his hands and proposed to a pretty pink-and-white creature, whose golden fringe had blinded him, and had found himself laughingly rejected for his pains. When informed of the financial crash, "It's all Sam's fault," had said Klaas, without further elucidation. "He'll never be able now to support a wife." This seemed to be Sam's own opinion; at least, he had never made another effort to obtain one.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, with your bronchitis!" chid Rebecca, as she fussed about the tall, spare man, removing his grey shawl and his damp shiny overcoat. "What on earth do you mean, promenading about in the wet?"

"Ruining your clothes," added Klaas.

The cat, annoyed by the smell of moisture,

rumpled her nose and retreated behind the stove.

"I—I—never mind," answered Sam. He sat down awkwardly, hitched up his clogged trousers awkwardly, and stared round awkwardly.

"The rum'll soon put you right," declared Klaas, knocking the ashes out of his Gouda pipe.

Sam started, sniffed, and, recovering himself, stared harder than ever at the other side of the round table.

"I—I think I should like some tea," he said faintly.

Rebecca dropped something, whatever she held in her hand—nothing breakable.

"Tea?" she cried. "You? Tea, of all things! Why, for twenty years you haven't touched tea after dark!"

"Wouldn't sleep a wink if you did," laughed old Klaas sardonically. "Tea! A deleterious infusion of—what's the Latin name? Comparatively innocuous in the morning, if made with ventilated—what d'ye call it—water! Pah!" He was suddenly enjoying himself hugely. "Don't give him any tea, Rebecca!"

"There's none left," said the spinster, in mingled tones of regret and relief.

"Some new fad?" continued Brunting. "Come, Sam, it's quite a time since we had the last one. Which *was* the last one? Shredded something for breakfast? Or Farm-Homes for City Orphans? I forget!" It was true that Sam Roskam, in the humdrum trudge of his

office-life, allowed himself the relaxation of what Brunting called "enthuses." His own health and the welfare of his neighbours interested him in a manner especially provoking to Klaas, who cared for neither. "Your body's all right, if you don't think of it," maintained Klaas, with the happy inversion of the healthy, and "The less you do for a pauper, the sooner he'll tire of being one," with the cheerful sophistry of the self-made.

Samuel Roskam, conscious of no claim to the self-confidence he lacked, seldom contradicted his prosperous and truculent crony. Night after night they sat thus together, chance intimates, like so many life-friends, with nothing in common but the accident of not living elsewhere. Probably—like so many life-friends again—they would have discovered that they disliked each other had they reasoned it out. Meanwhile, old Klaas Brunting sneered, and Sam Roskam never flared up in reply except when some matter of principle, as he deemed it, made protest a duty. Then his grey cheek would flush, and his pale eyes grow paler, sure of Rebecca's encouragement, feeble but firm.

"By-the-by, how are the Farm-Homes progressing?" suggested Rebecca.

He plunged into the Farm-Homes: the last report was more than favourable. The town-bred children took most kindly to the cheeses—"Eating 'em?" interposed Brunting with a growl. The cheesemonger would hear nothing of street-arabs and farm-produce. "As well expect them

to lay eggs because they're *foul*," he said. "I shan't buy their dirty messes. D'ye mean that you really give your money for this sort of tom-foolery, Sam?"

"I send them my very modest subscription," answered Roskam, looking straight at Rebecca. But immediately afterwards his glance again travelled nervously round the apartment, in and out of the corners. His manner was very peculiar to-night; she wondered what was wrong.

"The sort of man that potters about under the rain, instead of coming in," replied Klaas. He stretched out his hand for the tobacco-canister. "Get the punch, Rebecca! Do!"

Sam Roskam gave a jump on his chair—on the edge he was occupying. They both saw it. You couldn't but see.

Klaas shouted with laughter. "Lord, man!" he cried. "Why didn't you say you were in such a hurry before?" Again he shouted: "Ha! ha! Instead of jabbering about tea!"

"I—I—I——" said Sam, and halted. Rebecca had risen and was fetching things from cupboards, with mutterings about damps and bronchitis and tempting Providence and good stiff——

"I should like to say——" began Sam. He twitched up his eyebrows—he looked as if somebody were extracting all his teeth. The golden spirit gurgled down pleasantly into the tumbler from the long-necked black bottle. Rebecca stopped pouring in amazement. The brother

and sister both stared. The kettle sang, hot, on the stove.

"I would rather have no punch, thank you, Rebecca," said the miserable Sam. He breathed a great gasp, as if the last tooth were out.

But he was mistaken—it was the first.

Klaas Brunting, his pipe in his left hand, brought down his clenched right on the table, making tumblers and glasses to ring.

"Tea, and no tea!" he cried. "Punch, and no punch! I will and I won't, and I don't know what I want, or I do! There's no bearing with your cranks and your fancies, your whims and your oddities, Sam Roskam! Take the good drinks that Providence sends you, and go to the devil, and have done!"

"Just so. I don't want to go to the devil," answered Sam. The other only snorted.

"Has the doctor said that spirits were bad for your cough, Sam?" asked Rebecca in the gentlest of tones.

"No; he's found it in one of his rubbishy health books," declared her brother. "One of the blessed pamphlets he goes to for a new diet every month of the year." Now this was a gross exaggeration; but old Klaas hated all the books of the kind Sam had ever studied, for every one of them discouraged cheese.

"Diet be blowed!" added Klaas, and fiercely bade his sister push across his glass. She made a mild movement towards Sam; he waved the

steaming tumbler aside. "It—it's not a question of health," murmured Sam.

"Then, *what* is it, pray? I suppose we must know," thundered old Brunting. "I suppose you're not quite out of your mind—your thoughts still have some sort of meaning? So I suppose we must know!" He shook himself together, like some irritable animal, in his big brown cloak. "I suppose you've discovered now you can only sleep upon tea!" he said.

Under the reiterated insult of all these suppositions, Sam's self-respect wriggled right-side up. "It's a matter of conscience," he spoke. "A—a matter of principle. I've come to the conclusion that it's wrong to take punch."

The silence was oppressive. The cat came from behind the stove and humped her back in front of it.

"Do you mean?" ventured Rebecca at length. But that fired old Klaas. With his pipe he thrust back his sister into silence.

"Let him speak!" he exclaimed. "Don't ask him what he means! He hasn't an idea. But let him speak. He don't mean anything, but it's pleasant to hear him. Well, Sam, so it's—what did you say?—*wrong* to drink punch?" He set himself to listen, ostentatiously. His eyes twinkled. He was really getting a lot of enjoyment out of this, quite unconscious as yet of a deeper meaning in Sam's latest fad.

"I've been thinking about it a great deal these days," began Roskam, looking at nobody, but

speaking gravely to Rebecca, "and reading also. And I'm more and more convinced they're right. Yes, our great source of misery and wickedness is drink. The canker that eats out the heart of this nation is gin—Rebecca." He turned suddenly to the spinster, who nodded.

Old Klaas had pushed back his black skull-cap. His beady eyes were fixed on the speaker. Now he lay back in his chair. "Temperance talk, by G——!" he said in a low voice. All the lighter sneer had gone out of it. There was only scorn.

And all at once Sam looked full at him. "Yes, temperance talk," said Sam. "Thank Heaven."

"Thank what?" asked the quondam deacon.

"I thank Heaven there are men in this country who dare to talk temperance talk," said Sam.

"To drunkards, by all means," retorted Brunting. "Were you speaking to Rebecca or to me?"

"The duty of example——" reasoned the convert; but Klaas would not allow him to proceed. With both hands uplifted, "Spare us!" he cried. Then he emptied—an unusual thing for him—his glass at one gulp. "Might I trouble you," he questioned politely, "to pass this tumbler to Rebecca? Or is that a sin which, since yesterday, you cannot commit?"

Sam thrust the glass across and began speaking eagerly.

"You can't understand," he said. "I mustn't

expect you to understand. Only, don't you see, once a man realises—I've been having it borne in upon me for weeks—I wanted to speak before, only I was afraid that you'd laugh at me." "Oh, by no means," put in Klaas. "I didn't want you to laugh at me, Rebecca. That's why I stopped outside to-night. But, don't you see, when a man once realises how all the wickedness——"

"We've had that before," remarked Klaas.

"Of this whole nation," continued Sam, raising his voice, "is largely attributable to drink—to *drink*, Rebecca—you can't deny it."

"No, oh no," said the spinster hastily.

"When we realise that, why then—why then——"

"We don't drink. We drink nothing at all," said Klaas. He wagged his big bullock-head emphatically. But he prodded the tobacco into his pipe, with deep prods of an angry thumb.

"We loathe the very look of the liquor," said Sam. He struck his hand against the black bottle with miscalculated energy; he had to topple it straight before it fell. Rebecca, with an apprehensive glance at her brother, set the wicked thing away.

"So," began old Klaas, and the word showed there was a great deal coming "you're going to give up drinking punch?" He sat well back in his arm-chair and squared his knees.

"Yes," said Sam uncomfortably.

"Where did you get drunk?"

"What d'ye mean, Klaas? Oh, Klaas!" cried Rebecca.

"You know well enough what I mean. You needn't keep it up before me and Rebecca. Of course you've been and got drunk somewhere, like as might happen to any man, though I should never have thought it of you. Was it at that funeral, last Tuesday, the other clerk's? Well, better men than you have got drunk at a funeral, but they didn't whine about wickedness afterwards."

"I never took a drop too much in all my life," replied Sam. His tone was too absolutely sincere to admit of further doubt.

"Then I'm floored. I'd thought of the only possible explanation, and—if it's not the right one, then I'm done." Klaas Brunting jammed the pipe between his lips and drew three spiteful puffs. The cat edged away from him.

"It's the example, I tell you. Henceforth I intend, for my part, to set an example——"

"To whom? To Rebecca?" burst out the other.

"No—no——"

"*To me?*" His voice rose to that shout like a shot. He waved Roskam down, and the torrent of his pent-up eloquence rolled forth. "*I understand! You needn't explain any more. For the Lord's sake stop explaining. You're a pattern to other people that don't go in for your fancies and philanthropies, and always have been. You're virtuous, you are; and you know,*

better'n any one, what's good for your body, and their souls! It's well enough as long as you keep to your own atomy, and I've stood any amount, for years, of what suits your inside and what don't! *I* don't mind, as I've told Rebecca over and over again; as long as I can have my meals regular, let him talk!"

"I never interfered with your meals," objected Sam. "Though you always overeat yourself, and you'll die of it some day!"

Rebecca clasped her hands, in terror and joy at such daring.

"I should like to see you interfere with me in anything," screamed old Klaas. "You think you've got a fine chance now, but you're mistaken! You intend to come here night after night, and sit watching me drinking my rum, as I've done all my life"—suddenly he dropped his voice—"respectably, decently drinking my rum," he said impressively, "and you sitting there as an example? No!"

"No-o-o," he repeated, slowly sinking his gaze to the scarlet blooms on his feet. The cat turned her back upon them all. In the dull silence Brunting lifted his heavy eyebrows. "Fill his glass, and have done!" he commanded. Rebecca mechanically half rose, her eyes on Sam's face, and shrank down again.

"See here, Sam Roskam"—old Klaas spoke with leisurely distinctness—"either you'll drink your share of toddy, like a man, or—or you'll not stop to see me drink mine."

Sam Roskam's face went white, not whiter than Rebecca's. "I can't," he said.

"We've sat here together, every night, for more than thirty years. I've stood all your fads, as I said before; they didn't hurt me. But you'll not sit there preaching at me, with your empty glass, for my wickedness, night after night, I tell you. So you'll let Rebecca fill your glass, or else you'll go."

"I can't," said Sam. The cat, facing them all again, sat licking her paw, with an assumption of indifference.

Sam drew a vast breath. "I've signed the pledge," he said.

"Signed the——" Old Klaas stuck; his pipe dropped to the floor in a smash, and the cat flew away from it. Klaas lay back in his chair, as if some one had knocked the wind out of him. "A d—— teetotal fool!" he gasped.

"So, you see, I can't help myself now. The matter's settled," said Sam, almost cheerfully.

Old Klaas had picked up his pipe and now carefully examined the broken bowl. Probably the wreck angered him more than he knew. Possibly the wreck decided the whole thing.

"Yes, the matter's settled," he echoed. Then he pointed to the door with the broken stump and, looking full at Sam: "Good night!" he said.

Sam rose to his feet. "You turn me out?" he breathed. "After all these years?" Rebecca had risen also. She came round to her brother; he motioned her back with the stump.

"You can come back whenever you choose!" he said; his fat face had grown purple, despite his soft tones; the apoplectic veins were standing out in it.

"Come back? How can I come back?" exclaimed Sam, at the door. The quiet gesture, remorseless, was irresistibly pushing him forth.

"You can break the pledge," said Klaas. The other passed out, dragging his draggled coat after him. "The idiotic pledge," said Klaas, in his back.

The brother and sister heard the front-door bang. "He'll never come back," said Rebecca.

"The more fool he," replied Klaas.

Rebecca stood on the farther side of the table. "He was right, and you were wrong," she said.

He started, not believing his ears. "Are you mad?" he demanded. "You never said anything like that to me in your life."

"Nor never wanted to. Though——" she gathered courage, "I may have thought it. I've always done as you wish, Klaas, but—but——"

"Do you mean to say," he cried, half scared, "that he's to come here and reproach me with drunkenness, as if I was our cousin, Wim Loper? I—I!" He stood up and stamped with his foot, "I—I—Klaas Brunting—as if I was that drunkard, Wim Loper!"

"Nobody mentioned Wim Loper, Klaas. Besides, he's been steady now for nine months. He's reformed."

"Let *him* take the pledge. I'll be bound Sam was thinking of Loper all the time. Wim's *our*

cousin, on our side, and I daresay he thinks drinking runs in the blood! If he'd stayed here an hour longer, he'd have told *me* to sign the pledge. I saw it in his eyes all the time, watching my glass! I tell you I saw it," he cried furiously. "The canting humbug! Eat too much, do I? He'd have added, 'and drink too much,' had he dared!"

"Nobody could say that, Klaas, with your two glasses a night, and three on birthdays. But so full-blooded a man as you'd be all the better without rum, all the same."

"Are you taking his part against me?" cried Klaas.

"No," she said shortly.

She walked to a cupboard in the wall from which she extracted her bonnet and shawl. He watched her. She put them on.

"Where are you going at this time of night?" he demanded.

"To see after Sam," she answered.

"D'ye think to bring him back?" he cried. There was a glad leap of triumph in the cry.

"No," she said again. "He wouldn't come—not unless——"

"You stop where you are," he said, disappointed.

"Why, Klaas, he's never been alone like this before. I'll just go and see what he's doing. I won't be long."

"You just stop where you are."

She hesitated, steadying her trembling limbs against a chair.

"Want to run after him, do you? When he's never asked you all these years?"

She made as if she would have answered him rapidly, but checked herself. The cat, defrauded as never before of a customary saucer, plucked, mewing, at her skirt. She did not notice it. Then, steadily, she turned to the door.

That action maddened him. The words were out before he had fathomed their portent.

"If you go after him you needn't come back!"

The next moment he was alone in the room, with the cat rubbing against his legs for milk. Rebecca had heard and, having heard, she had gone.

In the ruin of his whole life which had come thus suddenly, he realised so much at once, clearly, once for all. They were gone for ever; he had made their return impossible; he could not let them come back without incurring their permanent contempt and his own. It had been his unswerving maxim to approve himself. At whatever cost he must stick to that.

He sat burrowing into this one idea, until he was deep down in it, in the dark. He kicked aside the cat, henceforth his only companion, and went across the room to fetch the long, black bottle, exceeding his most festive allowance. Presently he deliberately stumbled to the door and locked it, and put on the chain. Not too soon, for almost immediately afterwards he heard

a hand at the lock, with the spare latch-key Rebecca always carried in her pocket. He sat in his arm-chair listening to the fumbling. How long it lasted! At length there was a timid ring. Then a long wait. He sat breathing heavily. The cat crept to the door and mewed. So loud, *she* must have heard. "Hist!" he said. He felt the presence outside the outer door. He waited for a second ring. It didn't come, and unable to bear the tension any longer, he blew out the lamp. Then he knew there was nothing more to be done but to stumble away from the living silence in front of him, red and giddy, and resolute, to the darkness upstairs.

* * * * *

From that night Klaas Brunting, who had always known himself to be a very good man, became, as he quite realised, in duty bound, a bad one. He could not act otherwise. "A man's word's a man's word," he said.

His neighbours, who had always disliked him for his truculence, but grudgingly admitted his chief virtue, success, were delighted to find honest cause for abuse. All told how he had turned his good sister out of doors because she had tried to keep him from drinking. It thus became known that the former deacon was a man of intemperate habits, and people who had always deemed him as respectable as he was disagreeable, eagerly pointed out to each other that he was not.

His sister, as the whole town was aware, had vainly asked him to take her back—more fool she.

Then she had sent him her latch-key, and, two days later, had stepped, gladly welcomed, into a vacant situation as matron of a local home. The committee, though trembling at any risk of failure, hesitated for a moment over the stipulated nightly visits of Sam Roskam to the housekeeper's room. The male members said: "Oh, bother!" But the minister's wife said: "No."

"You must admit that it is—ahem—unusual!" said the minister's wife, who was not unusual in any way.

Rebecca, with some of her brother's obstinacy, declined to argue the point.

"If only you were near relations!" sighed the lady.

"We are relations," replied Rebecca, "but not near enough."

"Or—or engaged!"

Rebecca flushed. "We are not engaged," she said. The minister's wife sighed again with an air of reproach. As a fixed rule she disliked people's not being engaged when she wished them to be. And with a full sense of her responsibility she wrote to Sam Roskam, whom she didn't know, on the subject. Sam Roskam showed Rebecca the letter.

"She is right," said Rebecca quietly. "In a home like that the matron's example is very important. It *would* be different if we were engaged."

Sam Roskam lifted his mild eyes and looked at her. Her eyes also were mild as they looked

at him. They sat in his poor little attic, with the fading light about them, their faded faces, their fading lives.

"Yes, she is right," said Sam meditatively. "It would be better if we were engaged." Her heart gave a flutter at his change of word.

"Why shouldn't we?" said Sam softly. "I mean," he added quickly, "pretend to be engaged, of course. I know it could only be pretence."

She sighed heavily. "Yes; it could only be pretence." Yet the thing was most exceedingly sweet to her, sweet, and utterly new and long, long waited for, if hopeless withal. In his situation as clerk at the town-hall he earned some thirty-five pounds, not enough to keep his own body and soul satisfactorily together: there was no chance of his ever earning more. Between them, in the nightly intercourse of the endless years, had lain the oppressive silence of a something left unsaid. And now, suddenly, the thought had found utterance, a thought whose existence she had ever hoped, and feared, and doubted, throughout all her brother's taunts and her old-maid fancies. Over the autumn heart of the spinster broke a gentle and clouded sunlight. The desire of her lover was hers, an eternal possession.

"It would make things much easier," said Sam.

She did not answer, for she could not speak.

They sat together in the quiet attic. Presently she pushed down the green shade of the

oil-lamp. It was late when she rose to go. She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Sam. I will tell them," she said.

Old Klaas smiled most evilly when he heard the news. She wrote it to him simply, lest he should hear it from strangers. He had hired a woman, who looked after his wants, more or less, and spent twice as much as the "thrifless" Rebecca. "Ask her, when 'll the wedding be?" he said to this woman, tilting the long-necked black bottle again—now-a-days he lost count. "When I'm dead, I suppose," he added with an oath. He would not write to his sister, whom he considered responsible, somehow, for all the new misery in his house and heart, but he sent her a verbal message, through the minister's wife, that she never need count on a penny from him. "Alive or dead," he added. The minister's wife was rather glad of this, as she was anxious to keep her most excellent matron. "Tell him I will come back without," said Rebecca.

Klaas Brunting, from his place in church, his place of honour, could see the blue spot on Sam Roskam's shabby coat, and, one morning, with rage in his heart, he espied the same symbol upon Rebecca's breast. That Sunday night, for the first time in his life, he sullenly drank himself dead drunk. He gave his housekeeper money next morning not to speak of it to any one. His supreme dread now became lest the outside world should discover that its libels had come true. The woman encouraged a habit in which she

saw an easy source of profit to herself. He would sit gloomily over his glass, with congested brows, muttering that Sam and Rebecca were "murderers," over and over again. Once the woman, as dull-witted as she was sharply curious, asked him what he meant. With one of his now habitual oaths he snarled to her to hold her tongue.

It was many months after that, however, that the woman, having waited breakfast for him thirteen minutes—for him whose whole life had been a clockwork—grumbled her way upstairs, to find that the hands had stopped for good. She took two-thirds of the loose change out of his pockets; then she went and told Rebecca, telling all the neighbours on the way. Rebecca shed truly sorrowful tears, from natural affection, and also because the doctor said that her brother had drunk himself to death. "He was always apoplectic," said Sam. "He would have died, any way." And, as Rebecca, unreasonably went on crying: "We all do," said Sam.

The man who had been a deacon was buried respectfully, as such. All the more did the contents of his will come as a horrible and shocking surprise. His cheesemonger's shop and all his other little property were left to Rebecca and Sam conjointly, but there was a condition attached. The condition was that the pair of them should get drunk together within a week of the testator's death. That was all. If they failed to carry out this condition, the whole

property passed, irremediably, to Wim Loper, the reformed cousin, long since hopelessly relapsed.

"Oh, sir!" sobbed Rebecca to the lawyer. "Oh, sir!" weeping far more bitterly than during the funeral. "Don't let anybody know of this! Don't let anybody know, I beseech you! Oh, how unhappy my poor brother must have been!"

Sam gazed at her, as she stood there, with her silver-streaked hair, in her decent mourning, her handkerchief raised to her pale face. A great bitterness came over him against the villain who was thus playing, dead, with their innocent lives. "God! he's unhappier now!" said Sam.

Even the notary, who believed in nothing but stamped paper, shuddered at the words, and, perhaps, still more at their tone. It was some time before Rebecca could speak at all. At last she steadied her features, and, struggling hard to steady her voice as well, she turned to the man of law.

"Would you leave us alone for a few moments, if you please, sir?" she said. "Me and my—this gentleman, to talk it over?" The notary was about to make some suggestion, when a clerk, thrusting a fussy head into the sanctum, called his master hastily away to the telephone. Rebecca and Sam stood opposite each other in the solemn, little, musty room.

"I won't say anything," said Sam.

"No, don't," answered Rebecca.

"The scoundrel!" said Sam.

Her eyes filled with reproof and with anger. So much of both that he shrank back.

"I mean the lawyer," he explained hastily. And then, unwilling to pretend to deceive her, even where she was nowise deceived: "Being in a lawyer's room, seeing it's the first time," he added apologetically, "I suppose it makes me call names."

"It was very bad of him," she admitted quickly. "Oh, very cruel and bad. But"—her lip trembled—"but—it doesn't matter so very much, really, Sam, does it? We—we won't leave off being engaged?" She spoke wistfully—then, as his answer delayed, with sudden vehemence: "Oh, I feel it's selfish. I've often thought of late I'm very selfish, Sam. So that I may earn my living pleasantly, for I love the work, though I do wish they'd give me an extra girl in the laundry for the summer months, so that I may earn my living, I tie you down to this life-long farce." She broke down completely, miserably at the word; then she fiercely repeated it: "This endless, hopeless farce." Presently, calm again, she plodded heroically on. "I keep you," she said in tremulous tones, "from the choice of a younger woman, Sam."

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed; "I'm such a gay young spark!"

She set herself to see no beauty in the sensitive face before her. She tried to look at him objectively—in vain. It seemed to her as if no

woman's heart could encounter with indifference the gaze of those love-loving eyes. "A man doesn't age like a woman," she said. "There's nobody as old as an old maid."

"It's I that am to blame," said Sam. "Not brains enough to support a wife!"

"How strange are the rules of these charitable institutions!" she answered. "A matron may have a lover come to see her, but she mayn't have a husband come to stay."

"We knew that. We knew we never could marry."

A flush spread over her thin, old cheek. She would not have admitted to herself that another thought had ever occurred to her. And yet——

He saw the flush, faint as it was. "D—— it," he said, with a frightful fierceness that staggered her. "Let's get drunk and have done with it!"

"Oh, Sam—hush!"

"When a man's stopped in his path by a lunatic, he—he must parley with the lunatic," Roskam continued furiously. "When a man's threatened by a murderer, he must protect himself first, right or wrong! Is this murderer to kill all that's left of our lives, to crush our last chance of happiness? Is this lunatic——"

She thrust out both arms to ward off the attack. His anger turned on her. "Very well," he said calmly. "After all, you are right. It is far more natural and desirable and right that yon drunken wretch, who is not really a relation at all, should spend the money in drinking himself

to death. Yes, that is sensible, and religious and just. I am glad you are religious, Rebecca."

She pointed to the little blue badge on his breast.

"Plenty of men have broken that," he said.

Unable to speak, she pointed to her own. "And women, too," he answered her. "Doing wrong to do wrong, while we should do wrong to do right."

She smiled through her rising tears. "You are a bad advocate," she said. "You would really have me drink myself drunk, Sam?"

"Great God!" he cried, "don't you see our last chance is at stake?" He rose to his whole ungainly height. He struck his feet on the floor. "This man Loper!" he said. "This man! This drunken scoundrel! Oh, Rebecca, it's such a snug little business!" he said.

"It is," she replied, and burst into a torrent of tears.

"The poultry——" he continued.

"Oh, don't!" she exclaimed, sobbing.

"The cheeses——"

"I can't bear it!" she cried, her face in her hands.

"Wim Loper will let the whole thing go to ruin in a few weeks! The poor chickens——"

She swung round on him. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" she said.

He sprang back, but recovering himself: "And all because you can't understand that a madman must be treated as mad."

She sank her eyes to the ground. She stood still for some moments, trembling slightly. He could see her lips move. Then she lifted her glance and looked full at him.

"Sam," she said softly, "you really would have me do this thing?"

"No," he answered, and went near to her, he, who had never touched aught but her hand, and put his arm round her neck and kissed her forehead.

The door-handle turned, and the notary came bustling in.

"Such a nuisance, the telephone!" he explained. "Always rings at the most awkward moment. I was just about to remark that the dead man's heirs——"

"Wim Loper is the dead man's heir, sir, not we," put in Sam Roskam.

The lawyer stopped and looked at them, from one to the other. He laughed—a most unseemly thing.

"You don't want to—ahem!—get drunk!" he said.

"We may go—may we not?" suggested Rebecca, with simple dignity. She drew her shawl around her.

"My good madam, you surely don't think that the law—law and order!—would compel a respectable female like you to—to—commit herself——" He paused.

"Compel? No," said Rebecca. "But——"

"Quite so. I was just about to remark, when

called away, that such a condition, being immoral, is, of course, null and void. Immoral conditions count as if they were *not written*. But, when I come to think of it, of course it is very natural you should not know that. Most people think the law is based on immoral conditions. They wrong the law!"

And he laughed again, quite cheerfully, at thought of the ups and downs of legality, and also at thought of this highly respectable spinster drunk.

"I congratulate you," he said, "on your escape. Blue ribbon, too! Ha! ha!"

"You mean that the money will be ours!" questioned Sam.

"Undoubtedly. It certainly is funny to think of the testator's feelings, had he known. When he came to me I could have told him, of course; but I solemnly wrote this down." He tapped the document. "It was quite a good joke. I could hardly keep from laughing. You owe me a—ahem!—a very great deal, you two. But for my silence he'd have taken his money elsewhere." He was glad to have helped these two honest souls, and he intended to make them pay heavily for it.

"But I understand nothing," said Rebecca. "I cannot take my brother's money unless I fulfil the conditions of his will." The notary could not get her beyond that. He was surprised to find what a stupid woman she was.

"I know it was very wicked and foolish," said

Rebecca sadly ; "but he says Wim Loper is to have the money unless I do what he wants me to do, does he not ?"

"Yes, but the law——" Sam Roskam stopped the functionary. "We quite see the law would let us have the money, sir," he said ; "but we also see that Klaas would not." Rebecca, in her anguish, cast him a grateful glance, which rewarded him a thousandfold. He continued, in a frenzy of sacrifice, tearing his new-born dream of happiness to shreds—

"And whose money was it, Klaas's or the law's ?" He threw himself back in a beautiful attitude of innocent inquiry.

"My good people, what a foolish way of putting it !" The lawyer gazed from one to the other.

"Was the money the law's or was it Klaas's ?" persisted Sam. Rebecca nodded.

"The law's, if you choose to put it so," replied the notary boldly. "All property is a civil convention. The state sanction alone makes it a reality. As you see by this legal restriction of testamentation. The law, of its own supreme authority, decides how much of the testator's wish it will put aside, how much it will retain."

But this was above both auditors' heads. Quite stupidly they replied, looking at each other, ignoring him : "Klaas says that the money's to be Loper's." "He says it quite plainly," added Rebecca. She sighed, and turned to go.

The lawyer struck his finger-tips on the writing-table, annoyed, and nowise admiring, for a lawyer sees, not right or wrong, but law. "You have a week to—excuse me—to come to your senses," he said.

Outside the door Rebecca gave Roskam her hand. "Let me go alone now, please," she said. "Come Saturday evening!" And each of them went a different way, carrying, in a heavy-laden heart, sad and sweet thoughts of the other.

Rebecca took possession of her dead brother's house. She must keep it for the next heir, drunken Wim Loper, who lived thirty miles off, in the city, having made this little country town too hot for himself. The lawyer might wait, if he chose. The chickens should not suffer meanwhile. The one thing she dreaded was that strangers should hear of this scandal her brother had brought on himself and on her.

As a matter of fact, the whole town knew all about it, every detail and some more, that afternoon. And nine-tenths of the population praised her and Sam openly for their splendid behaviour, and seven-eighths thought both of them fools.

Rebecca stopped indoors, and kept almost out of sight for the next day or two. A stream of inquirers and inquisitives poured into the little shop. The shop-boy drove a roaring trade—for Wim Loper. Rebecca wrote down every penny plainly, and hunted up a lost farthing until she was green in the face. The

shop-boy hungered for the coming of Wim Loper. Rebecca, who had obtained brief leave from her asylum, undoubtedly longed also for the end. She wanted to be back in her own work, now permanently her life-occupation. She wrote to the notary again, and urged him to take the necessary steps. The minister's wife said that all things were wisely ordered. If Brunting had not had the idea of that wicked will, the asylum would have lost its admirable matron. "We miss you; we really miss you," she said. The town talked incessantly. People who had seen Loper in the city reported that the happy heir *in spe* was having a gorgeous time. Not unmixed with acutest anxiety lest Rebecca—or, Sam, at any rate—should repent of so foolish a decision before the time was out. It was a solution the notary had suggested, that Rebecca, if her scruples really proved invincible, should "repudiate" the inheritance, while Sam, getting drunk or not, as he chose, could thus succeed to the whole little property and marry her. Wim Loper, already an inebriate wreck, was torn to the ground by this horrible incertitude. "They'll give in at the last moment," he said. He resolved not to be sober one hour until after the fateful limit was passed.

The limit was Sunday. On Saturday, two days after the interview with the notary, Sam Roskam crept to the dead man's house, to his customary seat in the parlour, at the usual evening hour. The empty arm-chair stood

against the wall. The cat sat before the stove, licking her paw persistently. On the table stood the spinster's tea, and a glass of milk for Sam.

"Puss!" said Sam, stooping to scratch the cat's head, "Puss!"

The cat neither welcomed those that had returned, nor sought for those that were departed. She had rubbed herself against the legs of Rebecca's chair, if that be supposed to mean anything. She now licked sedately on. Her pink tongue was very warm and alive in the sombre silence.

"Drink your milk, Sam," said Rebecca at last. He sipped it, giving some, in a saucer, to the cat.

"To-morrow it's over," said Rebecca, with a deep-drawn sigh. "I expect Wim Loper to-morrow."

She furbished her favourite little brass kettle gently with her soft pocket-handkerchief. She had given it to her brother, for the evening tea-drinking, many years ago. It was the thing she had regretted most, beside the cat, when he drove her forth. She had re-found it, much battered by the housekeeper, and she had spent her evenings in the silent room, thinking and trying to work out the dents, as she talked, for talk's sake, to the irresponsible cat.

Now she sat in the old place again, with Sam opposite her, as in the old days, for the last time. When banished from the beloved pots and pans of her life-long solicitude, she had still known

them to be in their accustomed surroundings, performing their various duties for Klaas.

"Poor Klaas," she said.

"That brute Loper will sell everything," replied Sam.

He was a good man, but he was not equal to pitying Klaas.

Rebecca's mouth twitched. She closed her eyes, not to see the polished mahogany cupboard, the gilt vases on the mantelpiece.

"Klaas has foreseen all that. He wished it so," she murmured.

"Not he," answered Sam. "He was absolutely certain we'd get drunk; never doubted it. He couldn't have imagined any one letting money go like that. And he simply put in Loper's name because he thought that'd egg us on. The idea of Loper having your things! And, besides, I dare say there was a touch of sympathy between him and Loper, towards the end, because——"

"Don't," said Rebecca.

"He didn't know what a good woman you were, Rebecca. He never could have had an idea of that, had he tried!"

"Don't," said Rebecca.

He sat gazing at her. Presently he poured out fresh milk for the cat.

It was as they sat thus, with the weight of their grim destiny heavy upon them, that a loud clang of the shop-bell recalled them to to-day. Ten o'clock had struck. No customer could come at that hour.

Sam Roskam went to the door and came back with the notary. Rebecca put up a thin hand, when she saw the lawyer, to ward him off.

"Don't tempt me any more!" she cried. "Leave me! Leave me in peace! I—I have suffered enough. Oh, leave me, for God's sake!"

But the notary answered: "Are you not a near relation of Loper's? Tell me quick!"

"Not a near relation, but a relation certainly. I——"

"Wim Loper is dead!" cried the lawyer. His voice trembled, in spite of his contempt for the tremble in a voice. "The news is all over the town; the carrier brought it an hour ago. He lurched off his staircase this morning and broke his skull."

"But what difference does that make?" exclaimed Sam. "Rebecca's a relation, but she's not his heir!"

"You're a good lawyer, my friend," replied the notary, smiling. "Better than poor Miss Brunting here. Sit down calmly and I'll explain." He himself took a chair, overturning the cat.

"Two months ago Wim Loper came to me and made a will. Who induced him to do that I cannot say. He said drink had been his curse all his life, and he shed bitter tears over it, and finally he declared that in his death at least he would prove an example to others—he little guessed how truly—and he bade me leave whatever he possessed to those of his relations who were teetotallers, excluding every one else."

Rebecca did not speak, but Sam said: "There may be many. The number has increased greatly of years!"

The lawyer answered: "I should say it is hardly likely. There will be any number who now *say* they are teetotallers, but, remember, they must have signed the pledge before this day, Saturday, the eleventh. Mejuffrouw Brunting, you probably know all these relations, more or less?"

"Yes, I think I know all, or know about them," replied Rebecca dully.

"Do you think any of them are possibly blue-ribbonites?"

Rebecca answered slowly: "I know they are not, for—I have looked up every one of their names in the lists."

The notary laughed loudly. "You might have spared yourself the trouble!" he cried. "I never, in all my life, met with a blue-ribbonite, except parsons and young ladies—and, I beg your pardon, you!" He waved his hand to both. "That's why I put in 'blue-ribbonite.' Purposely put in 'blue-ribbonite,' and not total abstainer, or any of that vague rubbish. Always be definite in law-business. And when I heard of Loper's death I couldn't sit still. I had to run across here and tell you. *You* are Wim Loper's heir, Mejuffrouw Brunting, and no other, and I heartily congratulate you!" He grasped her hand, and also Sam Roskam's. "There's a Providence for drunkards and for fools," he said. "Not much difficulty in seeing which is yours!"

Then he went away, laughing ; and the shop-bell tinkled after him.

Sam Roskam took the hand which the lawyer had dropped. He gazed down, almost reproachfully, at the bit of blue in his button-hole.

"To think the blue-ribbon should bring money!" he said. "It's a fine cause, all the same!"

"I suppose that farthing I couldn't account for doesn't matter now," replied Rebecca. "At least, not so much," she corrected herself after a pause.

PLAY

I

"**H**A! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Bandelbos rolled about in the garden, and roared himself blue in the face. He sank down on the bench, exhausted. There was only one bench: it was not a big garden. "Ha! Ha! Ha!" he gasped.

His timid little wife collected her sewing-things, which he had scattered as he bumped down beside her. She had to stoop to pick up her work-basket, and she felt with a thin hand for a reel which had rolled under the seat, far out of reach. She was "bronchial." She sat up, flushed, and coughed.

"What is it?" she asked. "Tell me the joke, Hieronymus!" For she always asked him to tell her the joke, and she never saw it. That was one of the chief trials of her life.

The fat builder—a picture of coarse prosperity—pushed his bowler hat from his broad brow, and mopped his face. He mopped it with a coloured pocket-handkerchief. He had a yellow nankin waistcoat and a lot of seals. And he had bristly brown side-whiskers and a very blue chin.

"Jerry!" said Hieronymus. "Hi! Hi! Hi! Jerry's been telling me he's a man!"

Jerry's mother gave a little gasp. She sewed a few nervous stitches. Then she said, with her eyes on her work, "So he is."

"Pooh!" said Bandelbos. He had governed his wife during more than twenty years by that "pooh!" He had instituted it at once—in the honeymoon, nay, possibly during their courtship—and, perceiving its immediate efficacy, had stuck to it ever since. The thing, when you come to look at it, is painfully simple. Pooh!

When she ventured to speak again, it was to put the very natural question: "And what did you say in reply?"

"I said, 'Go and play!'" he made answer. And he shouted again, his fat sides shaking. There was no affectation about it; his laughter came bubbling up from some hidden source of fun.

"Do you call twenty-three a child?" she asked at last, almost testily.

"Twenty-two, if you please. You never can be accurate, Nella. Jerry won't be twenty-three till the sixteenth of next month. You see, I know even better than you."

"Oh, I know," she answered. "Well, is twenty-two a child?"

"Not as years go, perhaps. Though it isn't much of manhood, anyway. But there's a great deal between a child and a full-grown man. Jerry!" Again he exploded. "Fancy Jerry telling me he was a man!"

"What made him say it?" She had got to it at last, for that was what she really wanted to know.

"Jerry," he went on, not heeding her question, "who has never done anything all his life but fiddle and play the fool."

"He fiddles beautifully," expostulated the mother.

"I don't deny it. But, fancy a man fiddling! I said to him: 'Go and play!'" From a top-window of the square-built house came sounds of long-drawn squeaking. "And you see," said the father, "he's followed my advice."

"He always was an obedient son," said Jerry's mother.

"I'm not denying it. Though this time I should say, while not purtending to know much of musicals, it's tantrums. Yes, I should say distinctly it was tantrums!" The violin gave a howl. "You can't deny I've always been a indulgent father to Jerry!"

"I don't deny nothing," replied Juffrouw Bandelbos. And that is always such a difficult attitude to encounter in a woman, even with a "Pooh!"

"Nor a indulgent husband to you," continued the affluent head of the family, warming pleasantly to his subject. "I've slaved and slaved, earning your bread, in the sweat of my brow, ay, and your butter, ay, and your cake, Juffrouw! You've never wanted for cake!"

"I'm not denying of nothing, Hieronymus."

"Nor I for sweat," continued Hieronymus agreeably. "I've worked the skin off my bones, while Jerry has just fiddled and fooled."

"Oh, not the skin, Hieronymus!" She cast a glance at her husband's fat hands.

"Well, I can't help it, if you're so thin. It is not for want of food," he answered, aggrieved. "And I can't help it if Jerry ain't a man. It's not for want of money spent on his schooling. Schooling! Much good his schooling did him! I bet you he don't know the difference between lead and zinc!"

She sighed. A deep sigh.

"Nor do you," said her husband.

"Yes I do, Hieronymus."

"Well, what is the difference?"

She paused before her careful reply. "Why, lead is just lead, of course," she said, sewing, "and zinc is zinc."

"And a fiddle's a fiddle," said Hieronymus. "And a fool is just simply a fool."

"The boy's a good boy," persisted the little woman.

"For a boy, yes. That's right: let's talk of boys, I'm not dispraising my boy. He's a good lad, in his way, which isn't mine, and I can't think where he got his fiddle-faddling from."

"When you was barely twenty, Hieronymus——"

He caught the words off her lips. "When I was barely twenty I was took into my uncle's business. And I worked sixteen hours of the

twenty-four. *I* didn't play. It was bricks and mortar for me all day, Nella, and very little straw! Well, I've made my modest pile." He rattled something in his trousers pocket; it wasn't loose cash; it was something even better, keys. He rose to his legs. "And Jerry can fiddle," he said. "Lord knows I would rather have had him an honest builder, making money, like me." He walked away, but by the swing—Jerry's swing—he halted and turned to her, laughing: "Jerry a man!" he said. "Fancy his saying that to *me*!"

She gathered her work up to her bosom and came hurriedly after him. "But what made him say it?" she cried.

He looked at her. "You can't guess? He hasn't told you nothing?" And, as she shook her head: "Then he ought to. He ought to go to his mother, the baby! Why, he swings on this swing for hours, till it makes me sick to look at him. A 'man' on a swing, swinging, for a hard-working, honest builder to see!"

II

She limped back—she had a slight limp, more a stumble than a lameness—she limped back with her work-basket, and the over-hanging bit of her husband's clothing, along the narrow path between the apple-trees to the house. It was all neat and prosperous and well kept. The square building looked fresh from a toy-shop. And

everything about it was spick and span. She and her husband saw after that: he had nothing to complain of in his housekeeper. Nor she in the man who earned her "cake." They jogged on very comfortably, and Jerry, their only child, delighted his mother, and amused his father, by chiefly playing the fiddle.

The mother now stumped up the stairs in the direction of the screeching. It was a call to her, impulsive, imperious, withal appealing!

As she opened the door the music rushed out at her, louder and faster; it hurried on, while she stood waiting; it fell over itself, as it were, in its haste to get at her, and away from the performer, excited, self-conscious, conscious of her presence. It stopped with a yell.

Jerry put down his violin very gently and faced his mother. Undoubtedly he was boyish-looking for his age, very fair and curly, pink and white, with clear blue eyes and a rather dreamy look. He said nothing.

"Jerry, you haven't been quarrelling with father?"

"No," he answered. "Have I ever quarrelled with father? I wish father would quarrel with me. He only pats me on the back and laughs."

"Father isn't quarrelsome," said mother.

"I'm not a child," said Jerry. She sat down beside him on his black horsehair sofa. "Tell me what it was all about!"

"Of course you know I'm in love with Hettie Klop?"

"How should I know? You never said a word about it."

"Oh, mother knows." He looked down, striking his fiddle-stick against the tip of his boot. Then he looked up, full into her tired eyes. She laughed.

"You knew I was in love," he said. "Why, my violin would have told you that."

"Yes, I knew," she answered, with a glad light on her face, and a sad catch in her voice.

"And with whom else could it have been but with Hettie?"

"With a dozen other girls that would have pleased your father better. Why, the village is full of pretty girls."

"I never saw another except Hettie," he answered. "Who are the other pretty girls?"

"It's no use mentioning them just now," she said sorrowfully. "Poor drunken Klop the tailor's daughter is hardly a fit sweetheart for Bandelbos's son!"

"I'm not going to marry the tailor," he replied.

"Marry! How you hurry on, child! Child, you take my breath away!"

The reiteration annoyed him: "I'm not a child!" Then he threw his arms round her neck: "Oh, mother, I love her so!"

That melted her completely, if indeed there was still anything left to melt. "You should have her," she said, crying a little, "if I could help you. But you can't expect father to take that view."

"I tried to reason with father, but he only ran away, laughing. He laughed all the way downstairs, crying 'Child!' I could hear him laughing in the garden. Father's brought me up all wrong, mother; you know he has. He ought to have made me learn a trade."

"Ah, that's what children always say in the end when they've had their own way," replied his mother, sadly. "You didn't want to learn a trade, Jerry; you wanted to play about. - 'Oh, let him go and play,' said father, 'he'll always have enough to eat.'"

Jerry kicked the leg of the table.

"Your father earns a lot of money, building of his houses, Jerry."

"Such houses! Heaven forgive him!" thought the son. But aloud he said: "I can't help that." Nor could he. As a matter of fact, he fiddled well, and his father built badly. There are still plenty of good artists in little Holland, but the building, as any one can see who walks the streets, has all gone absolutely mad and bad. Designedly and dishonestly bad and mad.

"And what trade could you have learned?" continued his mother. "Your father'd have been only too glad if you'd gone into the workshop with him."

"True," said Jerry. "I can only fiddle, and that not well enough to be of any good."

"You fiddle beautiful: you know you do," replied his mother. What could she do but kiss

him? He looked so handsome and so disconsolate. He was a dear, dear boy. In the dulness of her monotone existence he shone like an unclouded star.

"Come, mother!"—he shook himself together. "I'll play you something pretty." He took up his violin and he played her Raff's well-known Cavatina. It is so simple and sympathetic—long before the little piece was finished it had drawn fresh tears from her eyes. But the tears, if analysed, would perhaps have proved rather selfish tears. No mother can feel altogether happy to see the new light, however radiant, spreading all over the heart of her child.

III

But father appears at dinner, and he takes a practical view of things, being a successful business man: he shows an immediate interest in the food, and a more desultory, but no less persistent, one in his son's future. When he remarks, pleasantly, that the sheep's feet is hard and the sheep's head (with a nod at his son's) soft, even a good-tempered lad may surely find father rather trying. Jerry had the sweetest of natures. He scowled, in silence, at his plate.

"Now, Jerry," said father, rising, and wiping his thick lips with the back of his hand, "I must be off to my work again. You go and play!"

"Well, I work hard enough at my fiddle," said Jerry. "I assure you four hours a day is

no joke." Once upon a time he had insisted on speaking of his "violin" only to his parents, but he had given that up as an affectation, like the honest, simple lad he was.

"Yes," said Hieronymus grimly, "so the gentleman that I'm building for, Mr. Zondervan, works at heraldry. Heraldry he calls it. It's names of people that are dead and done for, and when they were born and when they died. You have to be dead—or born: that's all. You needn't be anything else. I can see him scribbling, through the glass door, for hours, and I'm building a room to put all the names of the people in. He comes out, all white and fagged, to look at the building. 'Bandelbos,' he says, 'I've worked till I'm beat.' He calls that 'work.'"

"So does Jerry—fiddle till he's beat," said the mother.

"More fool he when he can go and play. Haven't I worked all my life so that Jerry might play as long as he chooses? I wonder how many fathers'd do as much? If you want to work, Jerry, come into the business. Time enough then to talk of your being a man."

"I couldn't build the right sort of houses," said Jerry, humble up to a point.

"I'd see to that. You'd have to serve a long apprenticeship. You'd have to learn a lot, child; you wouldn't like that." He grew meditative. "There, there," he said in a changed voice, "it's no use talking. You'll never be a man of business, boy; thank Heaven. I've always worked.

There'll always be enough to eat. Go and play!" He walked out at the one door, and Jerry, unable to bear his mother's tender gaze, walked out at the other.

Jerry, as is the habit of his love-smitten kind, went straight to the cause of his sorrow. And, as he sat with her in the honeysuckle arbour, under the dead and yet fragrant honeysuckle, he told her how good and comforting his mother was, and how good and vexatious his father.

"But I'm not a child—I'm a man," said Jerry.

"Yes, indeed," assented Hettie. And her gaze rested on him admiringly.

"I'll prove to him somehow that I can do more than play. I'll show him I can work."

"Dear Jerry, I wish you would," said sweet, pretty Hettie. "And father thinks so too."

"What, does your father talk too? And what does he say?" Jerry had made sure, under every circumstance, of the impecunious tailor's eager consent.

"Father says"—Hettie fingered her apron. She looked the sort of picture—warm, alive—that any man goes mad over. "Father says that he won't have us marry till—oh, Jerry!—you've a means of earning a livelihood."

"Isn't my father a livelihood?" asked Jerry, at himself, as it were, in his bitterness of heart.

Hettie shook her golden head; it shone in the sunshine. "No; father says a man must have a serious aim in life. Life is work, not play, says father."

"Does he, indeed? Now, my father says, for some people, like me, life's all play, not work." He ground his teeth at thought of the tipsy tailor making difficulties about him, the son of Hieronymus Bandelbos! Even the pauper tailor! His father was right! Play the fiddle! Play the fool!

He went home early, in dudgeon, vexed at himself. He could not bring himself to speak of the subject which had brought him, the subject which that morning had still seemed so full of interest, the theatrical performance of the amateur club to which both he and Hettie belonged. In fact, he was the soul of the whole undertaking, the manager, director, and star of the Village Players. But now, suddenly, the business seemed hateful to him. He could not endure to mention the word Play! Players! Play it so. You play the heroine. I play—Play! Play!

He slunk back, frowning. He found his father, after supper, in a far more serious mind. "Sit ye down, Jerry," said Bandelbos, in his arm-chair and dressing-gown, over his pipe, "and listen to me. There must be no nonsense, so I'll speak very plain. I'll support ye and willing, as I've done till now, so long as you're a boy. But there must be no talk of love-making and marrying. Boys don't marry. Men marry. And men work."

"I don't know how. You never taught me!" cried Jerry.

"I'll teach you, when you want to learn. You come to me, and I'll teach you." The builder paused and took a few thoughtful puffs at his pipe. Then: "And if you *do* want to be a fine gentleman, and never attempt a stroke of work, I'm not gainsaying you. There, had ever lad a more indulgent parent? But then you'll bide *my* time to marry, young man, and you'll *not* choose a penniless wife." He rose to his slippered feet. "Hettie Klop!" he cried, "Hettie Klop to spend my money! What a fool old Klop must think me! No, not such a fool, old Klop!"

"He won't have me," said Jerry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not unless I work at a trade."

Hieronymus stopped laughing.

"Well, it looks as if you'd better begin," he said, and took up his evening paper. He peeped over the top of it. "Don't be a fool," he said, "you just go on playing. Baby! And marry among your equals six years hence!"

IV

That disposed of the subject for the present. Neither Jerry nor his parents reverted to it. The exigencies of the young man's official position compelled him, willy nilly, to devote a great part of his "spare" time (the time not reserved for musical "study." A snort from Hieronymus)—to devote a great part of this time to preparations

for the coming performance. It was the most important event of the village winter, the opening, so to speak, of the season. The rustic actors were keenly alive to their distinctive responsibilities—still more so to their individual requirements. No professional company could have wanted more, or worse, or so persistently. During the next few weeks Jerry tore about like one distracted. It was "Jerry" this and "Jerry" that, at all hours, and on every trifling subject. He just found time, in the midst of his unalterable music lesson, to confide to his friend and teacher from Overstad the story of his love and his despair. "If only I were good for something," he lamented, "I'd soon show father how sick I am of 'play.' But I'll stick to Hettie, whatever happens! And I'll work for her, somehow, some day."

Hieronymus, when he heard of the play-acting, had uttered a sound between a grunt and a guffaw. "You may play at love-making with her as much as you like, boy. But not the real thing—mind! or you'll have to work!" For, in the play—a comedy from the German—Jerry, a dashing cavalry lieutenant, Ulrich von Sabelblitz, wooed and finally won Hettie, the young "Comtesse" Adelgunde; he wooed her through four long acts, and only won her, amid general approval, at the end of the fifth. The "curtain," in fact, was a benediction from everybody who had not died in the piece. Jerry didn't think he would have much difficulty with the love-scenes,

except in so far as they came too naturally. "Don't you make them too natural, child," said his mother. She said it several times. She looked very anxious. "Never you fear, mother," he answered at last, savagely. "I'll take precious good care not to compromise Hettie. Don't I know I can't marry her in any case?" Much worried, about footlights and scenery and half a hundred other things, he went over to Overstad, on the very morning before the performance, for the precious lesson from the maestro, which he could not and would not miss. He came back with a face transfigured, and leapt and sang about the house. "Why, what possesses the child?" said his mother, as they sat down to a hasty meal before the entertainment. "All this excitement about to-night?"

"All this pleasure from a bit of play-acting!" said Hieronymus. "What a player you are!"

"No, no. I don't understand. What is it, Jerry?" said the mother, suppressing her nervous cough.

"Father," began Jerry abruptly, "you'd have let me marry Hettie if I could have supported her myself?"

"No," said Hieronymus. "It's the other father, as I understood, would have let you marry then." And he laughed.

"But you've nothing against the girl?"

"She's not a fit match for you, Jerry. Don't you compromise yourself."

"Don't you compromise the girl, Jerry," said

his mother. Later on she followed her son into the passage. "Be careful to-night, Jerry! A girl's reputation is a very delicate thing. Don't you do her an injury, as you never could put right again. She's a good girl. Don't you act too natural. She never could hold up her head again in the village if you was to—how did father say?—countermand her. Remember, it's only play."

He laughed gaily, and he kissed her. "No, mother, I promise you, I shan't countermand her. Thanks, mother dear, for your advice." He turned in, closing the front door, "And thank father, too!" The door banged. She sighed wearily. "I'm sure he might do very much worse," she said. Then she went to put on her best gown.

V

As the curtain rose, and Jerry stepped forward, his parents' words seemed to ring suddenly in his ears. He put the thought back with a gesture of annoyance. He could see them sitting, prominent among greater and inferior notabilities, in a front row, with a sea of faces behind. He turned away, resplendent in light blue cloth and yellow braid, to a clatter and a clang of sabre and spurs. "I wonder," he began, "who that beautiful girl is whom I saw as I came up the castle steps?" His voice sounded as if it were somebody else's. But he soon got over that. It soon sounded very much like his own.

And through four long acts he made love ceaselessly. He was very much applauded all along. "He does it wonderfully well," said the burgomaster to Bandelbos, who grinned, not too sweetly. "And so naturally," added the burgomaster's lady to the builder's wife. The latter had a fit of coughing that really quite disturbed the performance. At the end of each act, when all the players came before the curtain together, Jerry and Hetty stood, a central group, hand in hand.

"I suppose it's good play-acting," said Bandelbos to his Worship. "I don't understand about play-acting. I understand about work. I only know that the play's one thing and real life's another. And in real life the play never comes true."

The burgomaster bent his head. "A very judicious remark," said the burgomaster.

But towards the end of the fifth act comes the crisis. Amid increasing excitement and in an atmosphere grown well-nigh stifling, the audience expects the gallant lieutenant to come to the point. He has long shown them and Adelgunde the state of his feelings. He must now offer her his hand and his home, as well as his heart. In a breathless silence Ulrich approached the dear girl on the sofa.

"Hettie, will you be my wife?" he said.

A titter ran through the serried ranks in the background, hastily suppressed. A thrill of general emotion conquered it, as Jerry quickly corrected himself.

"Adelgunde, will you be my wife? I adore you!" He caught her in his arms, as she consented; he kissed her; he kissed her passionately, while he clasped her; he kissed her again and again.

A torrent of applause poured down from pit and gallery, but it died away in the discomfort of the front seats. Adelgunde lay on Ulrich's breast, because he manifestly held her there. These kisses were not mere stage kisses.

"Look here!" cried a rough voice from the gangway. "This acting's too natural for me!"

The front seats turned round. Klop, the tailor, was making his way to the front.

Ulrich half released Adelgunde. "Why, you fool!" he cried, "Aren't Hettie and I going to be married in a month or two? Don't disturb the play! Order, boys! Keep him back. Ah, Count?" He turned to the entering actor. "Your fair daughter has just made me the happiest of men!"

"Keep back, Klop; you're drunk!" said a member of the committee. The curtain fell amid immense, immeasurable enthusiasm. Half a minute later two furious fathers and a frightened mother were facing the bold lieutenant, who once more held his bride in his arms.

"Play, is it?" cried the lieutenant; "well, the play's become life, real life. Yes, she's hopelessly compromised, as you say, Klop, unless I countermand her, father, but I won't countermand her, mother; never you fear! Play? I'm going to

play for her, father, and work for her. The play's become work. I'm to play in the Overstad orchestra, as permanent second violin, and support us both! My play's worth more, after all, than you ever thought, father! I shall play now till the end of my days!"

"You young blackguard!" "You dear child!" exclaimed the father and mother. "And what do you expect me to do?" spluttered Bandelbos. "He'll help you, oh, he'll help you, Jerry," coughed Jerry's mother. Said Bandelbos, "Pooh!"

THE PROMISE

THE day was blazing hot. Father and son were at work in the open.

Far and wide stretched the yellow cornfield, glittering, a golden ocean, with broad shafts across it of silvery sheen. Beyond lay the homestead, half shrouded in lindens, and behind that the green landscape was dotted with cows.

Upon all things, underneath the cloudless sunshine, slept a semblance of repose, excepting upon the two men who were harvesting their wheat. The rhythmic swish of their reaping made music about them: the fallen masses lay heavy before their feet. In silence they worked on, and on. Only the younger man, occasionally, would stop and, raising himself, wipe, with his bare brown arm, the sweat from his knitted forehead. At such moments the father, steadily swinging his sickle, would draw down the corners of his mouth in a sardonic imitation of a smile.

On one of these occasions the son, having cast a slow look behind him, opened his long-sealed lips. "Mother's started," he said, as he turned again to his work.

"Thinking of dinner!" replied the old man

with a sneer. "Twenty minutes' more work, Koos, afore dinner-time comes."

The son's red skin grew a shade darker. "'Tis a hot walk for mother in the sun," he said.

"Mother don't mind work," replied the father. There was a world of implication in his accent, and again an unsympathetic silence deepened between the pair, till from the misty distance, beyond the river, twelve faint strokes came trembling softly across the heavy haze. At the same moment a little bent figure appeared on the edge of the field, plodding towards them : the old mother stumbled along, with a bundle and a can, the midday meal.

"Like the steeple-clock," said the father, and a momentary mildness came over his features which they had not worn before. He stood gazing at his wife, the arm that held the sickle hanging loose in well-earned content. The old woman smiled : a ripple, like a grin, seemed to multiply the countless furrows of her parchmenty little face. She set down her burdens and began to untie the spotted handkerchief around the bundle. Father and son watched keenly with the interest inseparable from food.

"Beans again !" cried the father in accents of immense satisfaction, as he hastily removed the lid off a pewter pot.

Once more the old woman grinned. "It was father's turn," she said.

"Father's turn comes twice to my once,"

retorted Koos, with the air of a man who accepts the inevitable and doesn't mind it overmuch.

They sat down to their meal, out in the heat with the prostrate corn all around them. Few words were exchanged between them: they belonged to that peasant class which thinks little and has nothing to say. But any observer would very soon have fathomed the relation existing between the three: the closely sympathetic union of the father and mother, their slightly disdainful not unaffectionate semi-approval of the son.

"Has Koos done his share of work?" demanded the mother, pausing, with uplifted spoon, in the action of refilling her son's plate. Her tone was one of banter: she winked across at her lord.

"He's done as much as he could," replied the father: the son's countenance banished all expression, with an effort. But he showed undiminished alacrity in clearing his replenished plate.

"Koos ought to have been a rich farmer's son," said the father sententiously filling his pipe at the completion of a meal. "Yes. A rich farmer's son. That's what Koos ought to have been." Neither listener answered. This remark, first made nearly a dozen years ago and repeated since then at ever lessening intervals, was always received with a silence which, in the mother's case at any rate, rested on assent. Nor would the son's have been an eager disclaimer.

He well remembered when his father had first uttered this opinion, and it had struck him, at once, as based on an interesting hypothesis. He was sixteen at the time: he had found a hen's egg in an out-of-the-way spot where it had evidently lain for several days and had given it to the child at the turnpike. "You ought to have been a rich farmer's son," his father had declared, when Koos too honestly told him. The words stuck. Once only, in all these years, the son had retorted. "It wouldn't have been a sin," he said. The father pondered long over these words without fathoming their meaning.

But Koos Korver was not a rich farmer's son: on the contrary, his parents were of the kind that barely keeps its head above water, and is almost ruined by the death of a cow. Poor peasant farmers they were, of the humblest: hard-working, morning and night, in a manner not conceivable by a dweller in towns, but happy in the pride of—as yet—undisputed possession, owners, as grandfather had been, of the tumble-down, painfully repaired homestead and its dozen poor mortgaged acres, Korver of the Kolk. There were hundreds of Korvers in the neighbourhood. But Korver of the Kolk was a proprietor, rich or poor.

Poor he was, and proud of it, with ever-increasing pride, as his poor, hard-working life developed into his one great life-possession. Of evenings, in his chair by the fireside, dead-beat, he would sit gazing steadily at the palms of his

knotty and callous hands. They had become his conscious charter of nobility. The son, tired too and aware that he also had done his best, yawned wearily, face to face with a virtue he might perhaps approve but could never enjoy.

At the midday-rest, so indispensable to those who begin work about three in the morning, the father and son lay some distance apart, deep-sunk in soft depths of sweet restfulness, the father with his pipe, the son, on his stomach, his straw-coloured head buried in his arms. The mother trudged back to her indoor-work, a long way from this hired field of the morning's harvesting, along the white-hot road.

The father was the first to start up and resume his sickle.

"To work!" he cried across, at his son, who had already risen.

"Of course," muttered, under his breath, the son.

And the reaping went on steadily, with short, sharp strokes of the shiny sickles, and the corn fell, swiftly prostrate, in wide and harmonious curves.

At four of the clock, with the great heat still all around them, the reapers held their hands and gazed, with contented eyes, on the devastation behind them. For the first time, since their meal, the father broke the silence.

"It's time you were going for the waggon," he said. "I promised your mother to take in that hay from the lower field to-night." Without any

answer beyond a nod of assent Koos went to pick up his coat. He started along the field, out of sight in the nearest ditch, and the father, looking neither to right nor left, resumed work. When the waggon drew near, half an hour later, he joined it, and together the two men went down to the lower field and began loading up the hay.

In an imaginative moment, a couple of weeks later, Koos regretted that he had said so little to his father on that long last day in the fields. But he immediately recognised the futility of the thought. What could he have said worth saying? How many days had they not lived through thus in silence together, day after day, at work in the fields, with nothing to say, until the last?

When the waggon was sufficiently loaded, they started homewards. The long day's labour was done. The calm shadows stretched solemn in the serene radiance of the lowering sun. The white road lay restful. On both sides hung the hush of the deserted fields.

Suddenly—Koos never quite knew how it happened, and yet what was there to know?—suddenly a blood-red motor-car was upon them, shrieking, rattling, in a cloud of nervous noise and dust—it was past: the waggon was overturned, in a ditch, top-heavy: the horses lay kicking-out madly—Koos stood in the middle of the road.

The muffled figures on the back seat of the motor pointed laughing to their conspicuous

number, as well they might, for of course it was a false one.

The farmer's son ran to the horses. "Father!" he called. "Father, help!" He got no answer; hurrying to the other side of the overturned waggon, he saw his father lying under the wheel.

The next ten minutes of frenzied endeavour exceeded anything that Koos Korver could realise in the slow thought of his after-life. To hasten for human assistance upon that lonely road would have been worse than futile: already the only active presence within call, the red motor, was fast curling out of sight. He flung himself, single-handed, upon the horses, the waggon, straining as he had never strained before, with prayers and imprecations: he was not over-strong: he was not, as has been said, over-active: in this crisis his energies seemed multiplied tenfold. At last, breathless, with heaving chest and starting eye-balls, he stood beside the trembling brutes, abusing them, imploring them not to take fright again. He then succeeded, after cutting the trace which was not broken, in extracting the poor injured body from under the wheel. He had to tie the horses to a tree, before he could venture to place his father against a bank and commence his few awkward attempts at succour.

Korver of the Kolk lay groaning in semi-conscious agony. Twice he opened his eyes: twice he endeavoured in vain to speak. The son, seeing, with a peasant's constant perception

how animals die, that the end was approaching, wondered wildly whether he could do anything to avert, or at any rate, alleviate it. He thought not. When that look came about a dumb creature's eye-balls, there was nothing to be done.

In the majestic silence of the expectant summer-evening, clear as unclouded crystal, the approaching darkness seemed to hold back, for a long moment, the folds of its irrevocably sinking pall. The horses, still quivering, lifted their heads and neighed. A great trembling seized upon the dying man that shook him from head to foot.

"Promise," he gasped with a mighty effort. The son, kneeling in the roadway, bent his head to his father's lips. There was a long interval before the words came at last, with a rush of blood at the end that stifled them.

"Promise always to keep your mother at the Kolk!"

Jan Korver spoke no more, but his eyes continued to gaze into his son's, praying, appealing, entreating, as only dying eyes can pray.

"I promise," said the son. A few minutes later he closed the eyes and rose to his feet. He lifted the dead body on to one of the horses—not the one that had shied—and, in the act of jumping on to its companion, hesitated, and came down heavily again on the ground.

"No," he said aloud. And, leading both animals, and steadying, with one hand, the burden beside him, he walked, through the serene

solitude of the night-time, towards the distant glimmer of the homestead. Once he turned to look at the dim shape of the waggon, a ruin under tumbled hay, by the roadside. As he went along, some big bird broke away out of the corn, close by, and startled him. He was too unstrung to recognise its breed.

As he passed through the farm-gate, the watch-dog, astonished, bounded out to meet him. Barking, the dog sprang up to her young master, sprang up to the terrible bundle, a supine mass, pendant over the horse's flanks. With a fierce oath Koos broke out at her. And, suddenly, as if realising something, the dog fled back, howling, to the house.

The old mother had appeared in the half-dark of the doorway. At sight of the strange convoy, big with catastrophe, she broke into an articulate cry.

"There has been an accident," said Koos. "Father is——"

"Dead!" cried the widow, and at the sound of that cry the dog shrieked in unison.

Half an hour later she lifted her face off her hands. She was sitting by the side of the deep cupboard-bed in which the body lay. Koos stood opposite her.

"What will become of us now?" she said.

He replied: "I shall have to work for two."

She smiled a pitiful little smile, so full of doubt it cut deep into his heart and caused him to set his teeth.

Then he told her, in the simplest words, of his promise to his father.

She broke into renewed weeping. "Always thinking of me!" she sobbed. But to the son she said nothing, and he felt that to her hand, so suddenly bereft of its staff, the proffered support was no more than a broken reed.

Yet he undertook his task bravely and bravely carried it through. He engaged, as a cheap farm-hand, the boy from the turnpike to whom, many years ago, he had given the egg. And he worked, hardest of any for miles around. The mother also, with the years of her loneliness multiplying upon her, worked, bent nearly double, still working, in her eyes a look of worn-out hunger unappeased.

"Why don't you go and amuse yourself like the other men?" she asked of him, almost testily.

He answered: "There's the interest on the mortgage to pay."

"But you might leave off now, of a winter evening, at eight o'clock! You're getting on for thirty: you've never enjoyed yourself. You don't seem to me to have had any youth?"

He was sitting netting by the fireside. He looked up at her in astonishment. She had never spoken anything of the kind before. And, even now, her face and her voice were chiefly indicative of discontent.

"Father didn't like that sort of thing," he answered. "Father used to say he'd never done it himself."

"Father was a very different character from you," she answered. "Father loved work, the more of it, the better. But it's hard on you. You'd enjoy a little gaiety, you know you would." She spoke with vehemence, a long pent-up energy of anger against herself, and this boy's nature, and their lot.

"There's the theatrical society on at the village to-night," she continued, spitting out her words as if to the last she would have held them back. "Why don't you go to it? All the others do!"

"The theatrical society! I!" he said. He said nothing else, but the words seemed to inflame her.

"Yes, you!" she replied, "you—you—you." She took up her knitting, and flashed the needles to and fro. "You'll find a clean shirt on your bed," she said presently. Then she knitted faster and faster: he had laid down his work on his knees. The silence between them became unendurable: he rose heavily, and slouched upstairs, and washed and shaved.

When he came down again, she enveloped him in a swift glance of approval, pretending not to have looked up. He went out, without exchanging another word. She knitted on, and, in the midst of her knitting, heaved one sigh. Presently she crept to bed, in the great cupboard-bed, for the first time, ever since she could remember, alone.

Koos Korver walked along the road to the

village with the steadfast step of a man who is resolving not to turn back. It was a festival night, the annual performance of the Amateur Actors' Club. The hired hand, Dirk, who was a performer—he brought in a letter—had talked about the important event all through the mid-day meal. Koos had barely listened, but he now understood the effect this talk had had upon his mother.

"I don't think you're a member," said the man at the door.

Koos blushed scarlet in the lamp-glare of the entry.

"I suppose I can become one," he said.

"You'll have to be balloted. Is there any member can introduce you meanwhile?"

"My hired hand, Dirk Pott," replied Korver, blushing more furiously still. The ticket taker,—a stripling of eighteen, monitor at the parish school—smiled superciliously, and the candidate for diversion found himself seated hot and uncomfortable, in a front rank, behind footlights, in the darkened hall. He had never seen a stage or stage-illumination: the play was progressing: the glare about the actors, in contrast to the semi-obscurity of the audience, disconcerted him.

As he sat wondering what the whole thing meant and what the performers were saying, so clearly in the silence, the double doors at the back of the stage-apartment opened with a swing. A young girl came on, attired in white muslin and pink ribbons, such raiment as Koos had

never before seen except in the squire's unapproachable pew. The whole audience clapped on this radiant creature's appearance. Koos Korver, though not knowing why one should do so, clapped too.

Immediately she opened her lips to speak, a monologue laying bare her heart's affections. "I love him," she said deliciously, looking at the audience, looking, Koos thought, at him. And all through the five acts of the performance she was sweet and coy and coquette, and most fascinating, lovable and lovely. To Koos, who knew nothing of plays, she was the character she represented, distinction being impossible to him between the actress and a part. He did not feel any desire to punch the head of the villain who insulted her, because of course he was aware they were only pretending, but neither could he realise that Suze Dolling, the inn-keeper's daughter, to whom he had never spoken, could be a separate personality from Adelaide Montresor, the wronged and virtuous and irresistible heroine of the piece.

He went home, dazed, and dreamed of her, the white muslin apparition that said "I love him," and smiled bewitchingly, and turned from riches and pomp and position, in magnificent refusal and scorn.

It was love at first sight, the overwhelming passion of a man no longer childish, whose mind hitherto has not been occupied by such things. The stage-vision remained with him in the

daylight. He called his farm-hand into the barn and shamefacedly questioned him about the membership of the Theatre Club. Was it necessary to be a good actor? He could never be that, but he might, for instance, carry in a letter. People heard of his plans with amazement : his mother shook her head.

During all that was left of that winter he frequented the meetings of the Club, and even took his awkward part in some of their rehearsals. He saw Suze Dolling in her theatre dresses, and also in her own plain clothes, but she always remained to him the heroine of the introductory night. He was head over ears in love with her : he ventured to court her openly, and it soon became manifest that she was not adverse to his suit. The other young men in the Club, after having chaffed, began to congratulate him, for few inhabitants of the village were better off than Dolling, the inn-keeper.

So one evening, when the winter was well-nigh over, a few days before the last meeting of the season, Koos Korver, having burnished and brushed himself to the extreme of human endurance, appeared in his rusty best clothes before the prosperous father of Suze. That middle-aged and unpoetic personage most amiably offered him a dram.

No proposal could have been more opportune. Under the invigorating influence of the brandy, the scarlet-faced suitor presented his suit in a not too unreasonable manner. With a few manly

words, from the heart, he told how sweet Suze was, to him, and how sweet he, on her.

"Quite so," said the inn-keeper, twiddling his thumbs, in his comfortable arm-chair by the stove.

"Of course I know I'm not worthy of her," suggested Koos.

"Quite so," replied Dolling. "I suppose it is a question of worth—marriage is. How much *are* you worth, by-the-by?"

The young farmer's heart sank into his boots. "Very little indeed," he answered. "There's only the farm, and it's mortgaged. I've hard work, day and night, to make both ends meet."

"Dear, dear," said the inn-keeper, "and Suze'll have five thousand florins of her mother's on the day of her marriage and a good deal more than that when they've put me underground."

"I know I'm poor," acknowledged Koos. "Father always used to say I ought to have been a rich man's son. I wish I had been, so as to be more deserving of Suze."

Dolling sat for some moments smoking thoughtfully. Koos felt as if the world stood still.

At last the father spoke. "I'm not one of those," he said slowly, removing his pipe, "as insist there must be money on both sides. You're Korver of the Kolk, and we all know you for a hard-working, respectable man that ought to make a girl a good husband. I don't mind your speaking to my daughter."

Koos felt as if the world suddenly went

round, with a rush that carried him off his legs. He was breaking out into confused expressions of gratitude, when the inn-keeper stopped him with a wave of his pipe.

"But I've one condition," continued the inn-keeper. "It's what the lawyers call a 'sinecure non.' Which means that you can't get out of it anyway. It's either do or don't."

"What is the 'do'?" demanded the young farmer stoutly.

"Your mother's lived with you all your life, Korver. Now I can't send my daughter, as mistress, into a house where her mother-in-law lives that was mistress before her."

"But how can that be helped?" questioned Koos naively.

"You must find another home for your mother, before Suze goes to the Kolk."

He spoke with great decision, but Koos, in his eagerness, smiled, knowing how easy it would be to explain the impossibility of any such arrangement, and he hastily told of his promise to his dying father, all the dramatic incidents of the case. The other listened, seriously smoking.

"You see, I am bound," concluded Koos, "by the most sacred of promises." He smiled again, heart and conscience well satisfied.

At last Dolling deliberately took his pipe from between his lips.

"I can't help that," he said. "You must see about that. But my daughter don't go to a home that wouldn't be hers, but her mother-in-law's."

"But don't you see——" began Koos.

"I see what I sees. I sees that I'm willing to give my daughter, with her five thousand florins down and all her expectations, to a respectable chap as can hardly keep a roof over his head. I sees that few fathers 'd do as much as that. But what I sticks to I sticks to. And what I have said I have said."

No argument or entreaty could move him. Nor was Koos the sort of man to argue or entreat overmuch. Very soon he gave over in proud despair. He rose to take leave.

"I've treated you generously," said the inn-keeper. "You, treat me likewise. Don't you speak to Suze till you've fulfilled my condition. Then you can come and fetch her, but not a word before."

"Very well," replied Koos Korver, and went home.

He sat opposite his mother as before, and the hired hand sat between them. He worked, as before, harder than any one in the parish, excepting the widow. The weeks passed: there were no more meetings of the Theatrical Society: the days were dull.

He would sit in moody silence, of evenings, for hours. She, opposite him, opened her mouth to speak a dozen times: the words stuck in her throat. Half his secret was their common property. She fancied he dared not ask the hand of a girl so much richer than himself, and she admired him for it. Personally, she disliked

the idea of a wealthy wife, unlike most peasants, having grown thus proud, in her long self-sacrifice, of her poverty, her husband's hard work. "Marry a girl that'll scour and scrub," she said, "not a pink-faced, play-acting miss." How much of this was attributable to jealousy, it would be hard to say. But once, after a long period of ponderation, vanquished by his sullenly silent ferocious perfunctoriness, she laid her hand on his shoulder, and, looking him in the eyes, she said: "Dare!"

He turned on his seat, steadying with both hands the turnips he was sorting in his lap. "I daren't," he replied. She went away without another word. She felt that she had done her duty, even more.

One evening, when he had been to the town to sell his pigs, and had failed to get a decent price for them, she met him at the gate with the tidings that one of their two cows had prematurely calved that morning, and that both cow and calf were dead.

He listened to her, very calmly, and passed into the kitchen, ahead of her. He sat down, heavily: she noticed that he clenched his fists.

"So that means ruin," he said. "Utter, irretrievable ruin."

"Not quite," she protested with trembling lips. "Perhaps not quite?"

"Yes, quite," he answered. "It means the foreclosure of the mortgage, for we can't pay the interest. It means giving up the Kolk."

She shrieked aloud. Unemotional as she was, he had only once before heard such a sound from her lips, when he brought home his father dead.

"I couldn't survive that! I couldn't live in any other place. It would kill me," she cried.

He turned his eyes on her, a long, penetrating look.

"I know it would," he said.

And then suddenly, quite unexpectedly to himself, he told her all about Suze, and his chances of marriage, and the inn-keeper's "sinecure non,"—all. For nothing mattered now, as it seemed to him, and his hold on his own destiny was gone.

He poured the whole thing out into her face that, after the first terror, had set itself stolid. However he might try to objectivise his voice, the pent-up animus of the last three months got into it and thrilled it. The new spring, with its budding and bursting, was in every note that referred to his love. Once or twice she shrank, as if he stung her: then again she composed herself, both hands pushed down, hard, upon her knees.

When, at last, he stopped for breath, he hoped she would say something. But she only sat staring at him, her two hands upon her knees. In desperation he hurried on, to escape from the unendurable silence.

"So you see, we have no choice," he repeated eagerly. "I should never have broken my word to my father. But now, it is impossible to keep it. Fate has made it impossible. You must leave the Kolk anyhow."

"Yes, anyhow," she said, finding voice.

"The notary will certainly sell us up. He told me so last time I went to him. So you see, we have no choice."

"We have no choice," she repeated.

Then she got up and knocked against the table, causing the tea-things to rattle.

"I am going to bed," she said. "I don't feel very well." She stood still, near the doorway, trying to steady herself by a chair. "You ought to have been a rich man's son," she said.

It was the first time the words had been spoken in that house since old Jan's death. They struck the son straight, like an insult. And he answered vehemently, in all the bitterness of his life-long ill-fate, cursing the day that had brought him forth and the years full of profitless strain.

"Don't abuse me," she said, putting up her hands, as if to ward off his words, "I wasn't reproaching you."

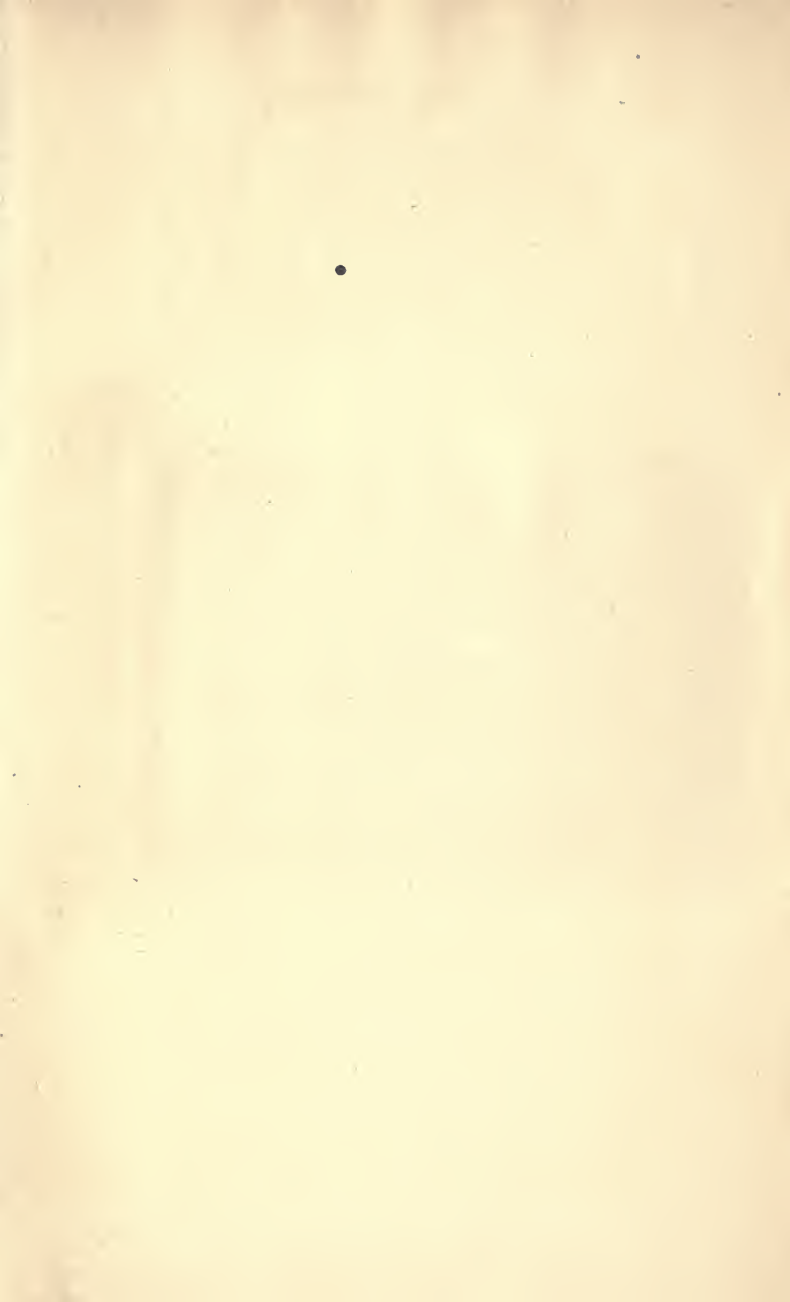
And she went to her bed and lay listening, dressed, till she deemed him upstairs and asleep. Near midnight she lighted a candle and climbed into his garret. He frightened her, as she pushed aside the door. For he was sitting up in bed, his eyes wide.

"I—I came to see if you were sleeping," she stammered. Her manner, her whole appearance alarmed him. He jumped to his feet and piloted her downstairs again like a little child, and put her into bed and tucked her in, and kissed her on the forehead.

But, when he left her, she said to herself: "It wants only a couple of hours to daybreak," and she stole from the house, in the pitchy dark, to the broad ditch that ripples and stagnates behind the pig-styes. There she bent down and slid her hand into the water. "How cold it is!" she said aloud.

She went back to the house, creeping stealthily, and in the pantry she lighted the paraffin-stove and made herself some coffee. She drank it hot, so hot that it would have scalded her but for the care with which she blew on it. Then, having extinguished the lamp—she turned back a few steps to make quite sure it was out—she hastened down to the ditch again, and several times she said "Jan!" to herself, on her way, out aloud, "Jan! Jan!" till, reaching the water-side, she let herself slip down into undistinguishable depths.

Koos Korver of the Kolk has an admirable wife and four blooming children. No shadow has ever fallen upon his married felicity: he is prosperous, and the best men declare he deserves his prosperity. But his look is morose: a curse lies on his innocent heart.





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